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Marxism Today

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STAGES OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Editorial Comments

THE capitalist "experts" on economic policy are full of gloom on the prospects of 1962 and are engaged in putting forward a host of contradictory suggestions. When we remember that capitalist Britain used to be the world's greatest leader, exporting capital all over the world, the suggestion of the *London and Cambridge Economic Service* shows how the mighty have fallen. It stresses the fact, often referred to in these notes, that British capitalist groups are adding to the country's economic problems, by lending more abroad than can be justified by the state of the economy.

The *Economic Service* does not want British capitalism to stop exporting capital altogether, and so it has the bright idea that British capitalism should be prepared to borrow heavily from foreign sources to enable it to expand industry inside Britain, which would enable it to continue to lend some British capital overseas to the Dominions and other countries. It recommends:

"British companies should be encouraged to borrow abroad on long term—e.g. in Switzerland. Those which operate internationally, in particular, should be encouraged to raise long term finance in foreign capital markets. A comprehensive attempt should be made to encourage long term investments by foreign firms in British subsidiaries."

That means encouraging foreign firms to develop factories in Britain by giving them tax and other concessions.

Says the *Economic Service*:

"Restrictions which hamper take-over bids by foreign companies should be reviewed, for example the offer in exchange [for British shares] of shares in American companies, which could if necessary be sold on Wall Street, should be permitted where the buyer has a good reason for not offering cash."

What a decline! The once mighty international lender has in 1961 to get propped up by loans from European banks; then it has to get a £536 million loan from the International Monetary Fund. Now, it is to invite foreign capital to invest on a larger long-term scale in Britain, in order that British monopoly capitalism may continue to lend abroad.

Even these things, in the opinion of the *Economic Service*, are a poor second best.

"Britain's real need is for a truly long term loan to deal with the illiquid state of her international balance sheet: short term credits are a very poor substitute for this, whether they come in an organised way from the International Monetary Fund or through the market from various sources."

We have had ten years of Tory rule, with no great war, with no international economic crisis and with the terms of trade moving consistently in Britain's favour. Yet the monopoly capitalists and their Tory servitors have brought British capitalism to such a sorry pass that, it is suggested, the only thing that can save Britain is for foreign capitalists to make it a long term loan. What would the Tories have said if it had been a Labour government that had reduced Britain to this sorry pass—not that it might not have done with Gaitskell at its head.

Workless in Boom

The American economy is said to be back in something approaching a boom, but it is still carrying a very large number of unemployed.

In the optimistic days after the Second World War it was believed that a sure cure for unemployment had at last been found. If there was unemployment all that was required was for the Government to increase purchasing power by various devices and the increased demand for goods on the part of the people would reduce unemployment to vanishing point. Kennedy advanced this in his election campaign, when unemployment was slightly over 7 per cent, or over 5,200,000 in round figures. By desperate efforts during the last year the Administration has got unemployment down by about 1 per cent, or 4,200,000 out of work.

The aim of the Administration is to get unemployment down to around 4 per cent, or between 2,800,000 and 3,000,000 unemployed. This is equivalent to 900,000 unemployed in this country and is of course a refutation of those who maintain that the problem of full employment has now been solved.

The *Financial Times* (January 2nd) tells us that "the hard core of U.S. unemployment lies in the one-third who have been out for 15 weeks or more, particularly the 800,000 who have been

out for more than six months.” Quite a sticky problem evidently. The *Financial Times* puts this unemployment down to “depressed areas, growing automation and the relatively sluggish growth of consumer demand.” So it looks as if handling unemployment in the capitalist world is not so easy after all.

Frustration

A recent talk on the Third Programme called “Content and Discontent” by V. L. Allen (*The Listener*, January 4th) begins by chiding sociologists for concentrating on the phenomena of discontent—strikes, crime, divorce—and declares that what needs study is what underlies the apparent contentment of great masses of the people.

He shows that this superficial contentment in reality reflects the deep frustration felt by people at the effects of capitalist production relations. The basic ethic of capitalism—individualism—has resulted economically in a gigantic growth of the units of production, i.e., in the great development of monopoly capitalism and what Allen calls “the bureaucratisation of work.” This empties labour of all interest, purpose, responsibility or sense of involvement for the majority of those engaged in it.

But the capitalist ethic of individualism is constantly seeking to make people discontented with their lot, to spur them to “advance” themselves, to lift themselves up the social and economic ladder. This is of course impossible for the overwhelming majority. Hence the frustration induced in large numbers of people.

In such conditions, Allen says, people see no meaning in their work, no relationship of their work to their lives, no rôle for themselves in society.

Allen shows how this process is furthered by the monopoly capitalist stranglehold on the mass media:

“Our points of view, moreover, are made up from information and opinions obtained from the mass media. Each one of us is fed with much the same opinion-forming material as everyone else. We are under constant pressure to think alike; and to a large extent we do. Our thinking is tailored along mass productions lines.”

In these ways conformity, acceptance of the status quo, is induced on a mass scale, and Allen rightly shows the dangers inherent in this, especially the danger of acquiescence in the policies of reaction.

Allen, however, is very vague about how to change this situation, only emphasising the need for “toleration” for those who do not conform. Moreover, his analysis excludes the class-conscious

workers and people who are thoroughly discontented with capitalism *as such* and for whom the purpose of life is clear—the consistent struggle to end capitalism and its rotten ethics and to build socialism, with its genuine humanist ethic of “Man is to Man a Brother”.

Health “Economics”

An “economic study” of the National Health Service, *Health Through Choice*, by Dr. D. S. Lees, recently published by the Institute of Economic Affairs, shows the way the Tory winds of change are blowing so far as the health service is concerned.

Dr. Lees believes in *laissez faire* economics. Individuals express their preferences through “the market”; “The market” collates information, adjusts supply to demand, enables preferences to be satisfied, preserves individual freedom.

From this point of view he argues that medical care should be supplied, as a commodity, through the market. It is worth noting that these ideas first found publication in *Lloyd’s Bank Review*.

Dr. Lees wants the hospital organisation to be broken up: some hospitals to be transferred to private ownership, the rest to go to the local authorities. Patients should pay for treatment, covering themselves by private insurance. A means test should be introduced for “the dwindling minority” unable to pay. Charges should as far as possible cover hospital costs, but these *might* be reduced by Government subsidies.

Family doctors and dentists should charge what fees they choose, patients should pay a percentage of the cost of each prescription, and again should rely on private insurance to help them out. State aid should be limited to assistance, after a means test, to those unable to provide for themselves.

To demonstrate the possibility of putting the clock back in this way, Dr. Lees instances Australia, where free hospital treatment was introduced by a Labour Government in 1946 and brought to an end by a Conservative Government in 1952, since when people have had to insure privately against hospital expenses.

Dr. Lees admits that private insurance would have to limit the benefits payable in any one year, and exclude mental illness, chronic and senile illness. “Few private institutions can go on paying out large sums of money in respect of the same person over long periods of time.” So the prospect for the aged, and for anyone who needs a serious and expensive operation or regular treatment would be a grim one. The choice would be to do without or be reduced to the National Assistance level.

When medical care is made a commodity many people are forced to do without, because they cannot afford it. This was one of the main medical arguments for the N.H.S. But Dr. Lees' doctorate was not obtained in medicine. "I claim no special competence to deliberate on medical issues," he says, and proceeds to demonstrate his extreme incompetence.

Nevertheless his proposals show the direction in which Tory policy is tending.

The B.O. Test

"B.O." is regarded in polite circles as something unmentionable. However, it has another meaning in the cinema industry, and it is talked about a lot—it stands for Box Office. That little glass-covered paybox in each cinema is where the film trade's statistics start, for the amounts paid there in respect of each film shown are the measure of success or failure to the trade. The assessment of critics as to artistic merit—should the critic be interested in this aspect at all—weighs little in the balance, compared with B.O. results. If it is thought that these should not have significance outside the offices of the big business interests concerned, at least it should be remembered that the Box Office is a measure of the public's response to the films presented to them. Bearing in mind that the public is subjected to all the usual pressures associated with the capitalist system, B.O. results are a fairly democratic manner of assessing films.

Two film magazines both give the same top three B.O. successes for 1961—(1) *Swiss Family Robinson* (Director: Ken Annakin), (2) *The Magnificent Seven* (Director: John Sturges), and (3) *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Director: Karel Reisz). Both Josh Billings in the *Kinematograph Weekly* (14.12.61) and *Films and Filming* (January 1962) claim to base their assessments on authoritative information from film industry sources, and there is little doubt that these three films were the British people's choice of the best films of last year. Josh Billings, who is rightly regarded in film circles as a living legend, and who had the incredible job of seeing every film presented in 1961, commented on Walt Disney's British production of *Swiss Family Robinson*:

"And the laurels couldn't go to a more worthy or refreshing film. Clean, jolly and exciting, it's earned the plaudits of all classes and ages, and, at the same time, really gathered the shekels."

Both the film papers quoted pay tribute to the Box Office success last year of the Disney organisation. Other Disney presentations were *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (full-length

cartoon), *The Parent Trap* and *Pollyanna*, both of which starred Hayley Mills, *The Absent-Minded Professor*, *Greyfriars Bobby* and *The Big Fisherman*. Billings makes further interesting comment on these:

"The Disney triumph is a clear-cut victory for uninhibited popular and family fare, the very stuff upon which our industry was founded, and upon which its hope of survival mainly rests. The Disney stable had an incredible variety of winners and each carried the U certificate."

That is a point of view which is well worth remembering when pessimists try and give the impression that the secret of Box Office success is horror, sex and nudity. (Students of the cinema know perfectly well that nudist films have little or nothing to do with sex!)

The Wide Open Spaces

The position of *The Magnificent Seven* (an American picture from United Artists), shows that, while the trend is for the Western to be more popular on TV, a well-made Western still has a place in the cinema—the wide open spaces had their representation amongst the runners-up for top B.O. placings with such films as *The Alamo* (also United Artists), Warner-Pathé's delightful film made in Australia *The Sundowners*, and British Lion-Columbia's John Ford Western *Two Rode Together*.

Comedy was well represented among the runners-up, again disproving the pessimists' views, with such as *Carry on Regardless* and *Raising the Wind*, both from Anglo Amalgamated Film Distributors and both following well-established lines, the first being one of many *Carry On* films, and the latter coming from a similar mould as the *Doctor in the House*, *Doctor at Sea*, *Doctor at Large* films, *The Bulldog Breed* (Norman Wisdom) and *Very Important Person* (both from the Rank Organisation), *The Pure Hell of St. Trinian's* (from British Lion-Columbia), *The Rebel* (Tony Hancock vehicle from Warner-Pathé), and Paramount's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Significant is that all but the last mentioned are British films.

Britain, however, did not hold the lead amongst the long-running spectacles numerically; though Billings rated *The Guns of Navarone* (British) the best in this category, the others—*The Ten Commandments*, *South Pacific*, *Ben Hur*, *Spartacus* and *Exodus*—were all from the United States.

A Break-through

Coming to adult drama subjects, the controversial *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* has

been referred to in these notes before. Whatever one might feel about its attitude towards the working class, it did represent a break-through in outspoken screen presentation; it was followed in 1961 with *A Taste of Honey* (Director: Tony Richardson), regarded by *Films and Filming* as best British film of the year. *A Taste of Honey* made a big impact. Also with an X Certificate from the British Board of Film Censors was the American *Butterfield 8*, a runner-up in the B.O. ratings of 1961.

The old-fashioned hokum finds little success at the Box Office these days, people preferring such serious films in the more adult categories as the British *Tunes of Glory* (which won for John Mills *Films and Filming's* The Best Male Performance award, as well as one of a number of similar awards from Josh Billings in the *Kinematograph Weekly*), *The Greengage Summer*, *The Long and the Short and the Tall* and *Victim*; the last-named was a serious whodunnit set against the background of the problem of the male homosexual, and, although regarded by *Films and Filming* as overrated by the critics, it found a place amongst Billings's runners-up as well as a pat on the back from him for its star, Dirk Bogarde.

The hokum in the religious film *The Miracle* was muted, being covered in treacly opium, and it did well at the Box Office. Judging by the assessors of what the British public supported, such horror films as *The Terror of the Tongs* and such others as *Nudist Memories* and *Nudes of the World* (if they unite, they've not even chains to lose!) contrary to expectations, have not quite made the grade yet as compared with the better classes of picture. Being very cheap to produce, the nudist pictures are nevertheless still good investments for their makers: one will have to wait before one can pass judgment on the quality of the latest in production in England, though one must admire the punning of the producers who have called it *My Bare Lady*.

Farmers and Big Business

The farmers' efforts to meet the threat—for they clearly see it as that—of monopoly capitalism's entry into agriculture make an interesting study and, to give them their due, one wishes that the consumers' co-operative movement on the one hand, and the agricultural worker on the other, were responding with equal vigour and initiative.

Big monopolies have long controlled the distribution of much of the farmers' products, and the supply of many of his requirements.

Now, big business is coming into actual production, partly through the development of new

techniques, such as broiler production—now of calves as well as chickens—and partly by buying up farms. There is also the rapid combination, through take-overs of "retail outlets" (shops, to the vulgar), which strengthens big business against the producers.

There has for long been a well established network of farmers' co-operatives, both for marketing and for purchasing. In the last two years there have also developed a large number of "groups" for various similar purposes, which are smaller and less formal than the farmers' co-ops and do not appear to apply the co-operative principle of open membership. This is a useful move against big business; but equally is a threat to the *small* farmers, who may not be invited to join.

Last month the National Farmers' Union announced with considerable pomp an agreement with the Agriculture Central Co-operative Association to launch a new company "Agricultural Central Trading Ltd."—to co-ordinate and presumably to develop co-operation and groups, and provide the necessary capital.

Good, again; but also dangers appear. If the new organisation becomes big and strong enough to "stand up to big business" it will be big and strong enough to exploit the consumers. The possibility was admitted, but the suggestion that the new organisation should work with the only representative consumers' movement—the Consumers' Co-operative Movement—was repudiated.

Big Business Representative

And not only that. The N.F.U. and A.C.C.A. proudly announced at a press conference that they had secured—at a salary which was not divulged, but is not likely to be small—a man to run the new organisation, and he was on the platform: a captain of monopoly capitalist industry, ex-right hand man of Lord Nuffield in B.M.C., ex-Chairman of B.O.A.C., present (and continuing) Chairman of Monsanto Chemicals Ltd. Yes, Sir Miles Thomas!

The working-class movement now has the job of showing the farmers that you cannot defeat monopoly capitalism by copying its methods; or handing yourself over to it. You can only do it by fighting against it, and that involves alliance with the working class and its organisations in the first place, in this instance, the co-operative section.

Tales by Brecht

It would be hard to find a better introduction to the work of Bertolt Brecht than his *Tales*

from the *Calendar*, just published in English translation by Methuen (15s.). This is a collection of stories and poems which Brecht produced in 1947, just after his return to Germany from exile in America. He chose the form of the "peasant calendars", collections of tales, homilies and fables which had been popular in pre-industrial Germany; it was the mixture of entertainment and instruction that particularly appealed to him. Brecht's tales, superbly translated by Yvonne Kapp, reveal very many sides of his art. They are apparently simple, even naive, yet tremendously rich and tough-minded. Always his object is to make the reader think. Some passages recall Shaw at his best, prickly with ironic wit; yet they remain stories, beautifully fashioned images which have nothing abstract about them, nothing of the sermon. Brecht's imagination was fired by the oddities of human behaviour and the variety of human discovery. His stories are about Socrates and Julius Caesar and Giordano Bruno and Francis Bacon. As with Marx, nothing human is foreign to him. Science and art, instruction and laughter come together in these tales and poems.

Who built Thebes of the seven gates?

he asks in a poem entitled: "Questions of a Studious Working Man". But the answer only leads to another question:

Was it the kings who hauled chunks of rock to the place?

There is nothing quaint or folksy about Brecht's folk-art. Especially to those who would like to sample Brecht's writing but do not care for reading plays this collection is highly recommended.

American Novel of Struggle

At a time when the Communist Party of the United States is again heroically enduring vicious attack, it is moving and encouraging to read a novel of contemporary American working class life and struggle.

The Magic Fern—of over six hundred pages—is written by Phillip Bonosky, an ex-steel worker now an editor of *Mainstream*, the progressive American journal. The title of the book is taken from a legend of those who seek happiness in life for others—and find it—in that seeking, for themselves too. The story centres around Leo Jomaitis who, with his wife and young son, returns after several years' absence to the steel town of his birth, having left it embittered by his experience as a militant worker and trade unionist. The circumstances of his leaving, after many youthful years

devoted to the untiring building of trade union organisation in the steel mill which dominates the town in every sense, is not revealed until the later chapters. In the story, too, the circumstances of Leo's leaving are not learned by his wife Ruth until they and thousands of other workers are caught up in the events which again shake the steel mill and the neighbouring mines.

The revelation is perhaps the most important part of the novel in that it portrays the tough militant worker, used to the violence of class struggle—a particular characteristic of American working class history—who although able to withstand the beatings-up by Company hoodlums and union-breakers, was unable to bear the castigation of fellow-workers who also turned against him with viciousness. Workers who have had similar experiences, but who fortunately have arrived at different conclusions, will, on reading these passages, find their hearts aching both for Leo and the other workers. Hardest for Leo to endure, however, was the suspicion of him held by his former comrades who had remained in the steel town while he had departed.

While concealing nothing of the difficulties of the struggles of the American workers and their undaunted Communist compatriots, throughout his novel Bonosky demonstrates unshakable confidence in the ability of the American working class to perform its historical mission. His writing is descriptive power at its best—the incredible heat and exhaustion will be felt when during the tapping of a furnace in the mill, a threatened "burn-out" is averted by the super-human physical effort of the steel-workers.

The book throughout is a tremendous vindication of the legend from which its title is taken, which alone is a reason why it should be read by all who can lay their hands on it.

Marxism and the Individual

The Marx Memorial Library is offering a prize of £5 in books for the best essay on "Marxism and the Individual" to be submitted by March 14th, 1962. The essay, which should show some knowledge of Marxist writing on the subject, should not exceed 800 words, and should be written or typed on one side of the page only.

In judging the entries, the Committee of Marx Memorial Library will be guided less by their literary merit than by the understanding and development of Marxist principles displayed. Entries should be sent to Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London, E.C.1.

A Profession on the Move

Max Morris

THE professional scene in Britain, once peaceful, has become turbulent. Teachers, local government officers and civil servants have begun to act: protests against government policy, plans for working to rule, proposals for strikes, actual strikes official and unofficial, the whole range of trade union activity common among industrial workers has spread to professions hitherto accustomed to only the milder methods of voicing discontent. True, there have been professional eruptions in the past: what is different today is the volume and intensity of feeling aroused, the large number of people involved, and the qualitative change of attitude revealed. How far one can generalise about the sections usually described as "middle class" is arguable: not only are there considerable differences between one section and another in social origin and status, income levels, conditions of employment and forms (or lack of forms) of organisation, but it is difficult to find a common pattern of response either to individual events or to deeper and more complex influences operating over a long period. Thus the reactions of professional workers in private industry have not been comparable with those of similar groups in public employment. On the other hand, as far as organised professional workers in the wide field of public service are concerned, certain common trends are discernible to the extent that a new factor has emerged in the political situation.

Among the middle class workers in the public sector, the teachers are one of the biggest and most influential groups. Their organisations have normally been regarded as "typical" of British professional unions. From the point of view of the establishment, they have also been regarded as reliable, socially orthodox and wedded to constitutional methods of negotiation—grumbling but never revolting against their genteel poverty. Compared with many industrial trades, teachers (and local government officers and civil servants) are highly organised. It is quite normal to find all teachers in a school members of a union, and, indeed, most young teachers enter the profession having already been enrolled while students. There are, however, competing unions in what is a relatively homogeneous occupation. Thus, while the National Union of Teachers (N.U.T.) aims to cover both primary and

secondary teachers of all kinds, other associations exist which organise the great majority working in grammar (including many in public) schools, and the National Association of Schoolmasters (N.A.S.) takes in men only (though a minority of the total number of men teachers) in a profession three-fifths of which are women. There is also the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions (A.T.T.I.) organising the technical colleges, which is in partnership with the N.U.T. through a system of joint membership and mutual representation at Executive level.¹

Thus the N.U.T./A.T.T.I. while enrolling nearly four-fifths of the teachers cannot speak for the bulk of grammar school teachers and for many men in primary and secondary modern schools. Professional disunity creates big problems especially when action is contemplated.

On the whole the unions have a very democratic structure based on local associations which have considerable autonomy, and which normally cover the area of a local education authority (L.E.A.) or an administrative division of an authority. Annual conferences make policy and lay executives are elected usually on a regional basis: but officials are appointed for life by the executives, exercise a big influence, are highly paid relative to the bulk of their members and so tend to be out of touch with the economic problems of the rank and file.

This democratic structure is not however paralleled by a democratic breadth of discussion, and this applies to nearly all the professional organisations. The teachers' unions are "non-political", that is they adopt purely *ad hoc* attitudes to particular governments on matters that directly affect teachers and the education service, and rarely express views on political issues in general. Teachers as citizens, it is held, have ample opportunity to be "political"; when they meet as teachers they should be "professional" and not create divisions within the ranks on non-educational or non-professional matters. So at

¹ There has always been a complete organisational separation between teachers in schools and technical colleges on the one hand and teachers in universities and training colleges on the other. There is an almost exact parallel set-up in Scotland to that described here: this article deals with school teachers in England and Wales.

national conferences (though local associations are much more flexible) there has grown up over the years a virtual ban on discussion of domestic or foreign affairs which cannot be clearly and directly linked with education, in spite of the fact that they do affect education, including salaries, materially. The illusion has been fostered that education is not part of "politics" or if it is it should not be; education, it is argued, should be discussed in isolation from other issues as far as possible.

Naturally, the left elements in the profession have pointed out that these ideas seriously hamper the development of effective action to achieve educational and professional aims. Political "neutrality", they argue, is an absurdity for the practitioners of a major social service entirely financed from public funds and materially affecting the nation's social and economic life: it is in practice a form of political conservatism. Not surprisingly, the right wing in the unions are its most ardent advocates.

II

It is worth while going back a little to see what light can be thrown on the growth of this attitude which plays such a big part in influencing British political life. The First World War and its aftermath of social upheaval saw a quite considerable teachers' movement including a very substantial volume of support for affiliation to the Labour Party, and strike action which won the present system of negotiating machinery, the Burnham Committees composed of representatives of the main teachers' unions and the L.E.A.s (as the direct employers) under a government-appointed chairman. The resultant Burnham scales established lower salaries for elementary school teachers, the bulk of the profession, who taught working class children, and higher ones for secondary (mainly grammar) school teachers, who were largely university graduates and whose pupils were mainly middle- and lower-middle-class children.

There followed a period of relative quiescence in spite of repeated attacks on salaries by reactionary governments. For even the elementary teachers were appreciably better off than industrial workers, who suffered not only from very low wages but from short time and unemployment; students might find it hard to get jobs, but once appointed security was virtually assured. So there was therefore no urgent incentive for teachers' organisations to join in the sharp struggles of the working class which marked the period. As for secondary teachers, though the aristocracy of the profession, their salaries were

still too low for them to consider themselves on a par with other professions, such as doctors. The education service was going through a difficult period, under constant attack from the right and subject to almost unending economy waves, so that there was hardly the atmosphere for encouraging professional self-respect, far less a militant professional spirit.

These are the basic reasons why political "neutrality" flourished in the inter-war period and why every backward political tendency, such as keeping aloof from the Labour movement, or even the parents, gained strength. It was relatively easy to persuade teachers, better off than the industrial workers on the one hand and not so well off as the higher paid professions on the other, that as an organised body they belonged to neither side in the class struggle.

When a major attack on salaries took place in the economic crisis of the 1930's the unions, while roused to indignation, fought mainly against discrimination which would have cut their salaries more than others. They did not challenge the government's general economic policy so that, in the main, militancy was limited in outlook and not comparable in scope with the mass movements of the workers, from which the organised profession kept away. Nevertheless there remained a legacy of bitterness and discontent as well as the experience of a measure of militancy and leadership, if local only, of a different type than hitherto.

Progressive teachers emphasised the need for the unions to play an active part in winning educational advance and put forward the salary objective of a basic scale for all teachers to replace the separate scales that bred disunity and so weakened the general salaries struggle. These policies provided an education in political realities, for the demand for educational advance showed up clearly Tory defence of class privilege, while the fight for the basic scale showed up reactionary opposition to improvement in the status of the elementary school teacher whose job lay with the working class. Both policies were clearly linked: economic advance for the teachers depended on educational advance for the workers.

Perhaps the greatest contribution to the development of progressive professional thinking came with the social upheaval arising from the Second World War and the creation of the Council for Educational Advance, in which the N.U.T. decided to join with the Trades Union Congress, the Co-operative Union and the Workers' Educational Association in a great campaign for a democratic education system. This raised every class educational question in a poli-

tical way, and though the union played on the whole a restraining role even this was a big advance on its previous attitude. It was no accident that the same social circumstances produced an official report which declared that teachers were "seriously underpaid", and recommended considerably higher salaries.

Compromise was the result of the educational campaign. The 1944 Education Act did not plan, far less produce, a democratic education system, but it did legislate important advances. Similarly a basic scale of salaries was created in 1945, but on top was built a structure of differentials mainly intended to appease the higher paid grammar school teachers; nevertheless the ordinary class teacher received a lift up. From these educational and salary changes grew an entirely new atmosphere in the teaching profession, one of greater self-confidence especially for the old elementary (now called primary or secondary modern) school teacher who was encouraged to regard himself as doing a job publicly acknowledged as valuable for the nation.

III

Four major factors played a part in the post-war years in developing teachers' militancy. First was the improved position of industrial relative to white collar workers as the result of wartime and post-war full employment and trade union organisation. This acted as a spur to teachers, who increasingly realised that to keep up with economic and social changes and maintain their relative status, they would have seriously to reconsider their policies and methods. Secondly, some professional groups, particularly the doctors, were adopting aggressive attitudes on remuneration and demanding upgrading of pay at least sufficient to maintain pre-war relativities. To teachers this was a salutary lesson, for if the doctors, an overwhelmingly middle-class group, could adopt such postures and with success, why could not they, and with similar results? Thirdly, inflation, especially after 1949, emphasised to the teachers the fact that recommendations made during the war had not been implemented and that they were in general worse off than before, not only relatively, but absolutely. Fourthly, the deeper public interest in education helped to increase the profession's self-confidence: one did not apologise so often for being a teacher, it was even something to be proud of. The 1948 salary agreement gave teachers an increase varying from £15 to £30 a year; an indication of the changing attitude was the demand in the following year

by the Scottish teachers (first in the field) for an increase of £150.

Continuous ferment marked the years after 1948, and discontent was increased by salary agreements which emphasised the differentials at the expense of the basic scale. But it was (and is) a complex situation, involving what seem to be contradictory pressures. With their new-found confidence teachers openly compared their work and pay with those of doctors and other highly paid (by comparison) professional groups. The word "profession" appeared increasingly in teachers' vocabulary, and salary aims were summarised as a "professional scale". Professionalism, however, was often translated as meaning "peaceful and constitutional" methods of negotiation. Professions did not strike.

In that case how was the professional scale to be achieved, since employers showed no signs of granting it during the normal routine of Burnham negotiations? It was obvious that industrial workers were managing to keep their end up, and some had achieved what looked to teachers to be substantial gains because they either held in reserve the power of withholding labour or actually used it. Put simply, industrial employers were afraid of industrial workers: teachers held no terrors for *their* employers. At one and the same time all teachers wanted to be a "profession", and very many of them wanted to behave like a "union". All this was subtly, slowly, but surely altering attitudes of mind and habits of thought and destroying old prejudices and social preconceptions.

Symptomatic of the situation was the casting of big minority votes against salary agreements, demands for "interim awards" between dated agreements, insistence on public campaigning for specific demands, the holding of strike ballots (not for specific strikes, but on the "principle," a typically abstract way of doing things) among the grammar school men teachers in England and Wales and the Scottish teachers—probably the most "professional" in outlook of the unions. Another example was the resistance to the government's proposal to increase teachers' superannuation payments by one per cent; on this occasion (1956) an N.U.T. conference passed a resolution instructing the Executive "to use the full resources of the union" to oppose the proposal. As it turned out this was whittled down by a right-wing leadership to the withdrawal of teachers from the school savings movement. But feeble as this sanction was, it made a big impression because it was an *action* and not just a verbal protest. At the same time demands

multiplied for direct action to end the irritation of "dinner duties".

No wonder then that when in 1959 the L.E.A. were as usual proving intransigent over a salary demand, and there was open government intervention to grant even less than was being offered, the N.U.T. took the unprecedented step of considering the application of "sanctions".

In the event the members accepted a most unsatisfactory offer, recommended as usual by their leaders—but with a big minority (nearly a third of the membership) prepared to face the alternative offered of major strikes. This was the new feature of the situation; consideration of strike action had become practical politics: it had become respectable. It is significant that at approximately the same time as this was happening there was an upsurge of militancy among bank employees and local government officers; a ballot for T.U.C. affiliation nearly won a majority among the latter; and the doctors had recently won a substantial increase—so further widening the gap between them and the "more proletarian professions".

IV

Discontent smouldered in staffrooms and local associations following the 1959 agreement. Not only the minority who had been ready for strike but many others felt that an opportunity had been lost in conditions of a severe shortage of teachers and coincident with a major public clamour on Britain's backwardness in science and technology. No wonder an explosion occurred when, with unexampled cynicism, the government decided to increase policemen's pay substantially above the level rejected for teachers. Although the current agreement was due to last till April 1962, the teachers put in a new claim in January 1961. Almost simultaneously the Scottish teachers found themselves in conflict with the government and a strike was planned (and later took place) by the Glasgow branch of the Educational Institute of Scotland (the equivalent of the N.U.T.) with the support, under strong pressure, of the national body.

Events moved rapidly. At Easter the N.U.T. conference, against the advice of its top leaders, insisted on expressing their solidarity with the Scots in the clearest possible way, fully appreciating the moral position thus created by supporting someone else's strike. Negotiations were conducted in the Burnham Committee by teachers' representatives conscious of a growing militant force behind them determined "to fight this time". So that when the outcome was the customary unsatisfactory provisional agreement, for

the first time in professional history a majority of the N.U.T. Executive rejected the recommendation of their own representatives, and decided to propose to a conference the reopening of negotiations backed up by the threat of a one-day national strike without pay, and a series of area strikes in the autumn with strike pay of 95 per cent of salary. Strike pay was to be provided half from the relatively small union "sustentation" fund and half from a national levy of 5 per cent of gross salary from all members of the union in the country, a very big commitment for an indefinite period. The conference overwhelmingly rejected the provisional agreement but carried strike action by only a relatively small majority. It should be recognised that the operation of area strikes with pay was subject, by union rule, to securing in the selected areas by secret ballot a 75 per cent majority of *all members* on the books. The point is that such was the tradition of the N.U.T. that the rules were in effect designed to prevent strikes ever happening, for probably no union in Britain, with the exception of the miners, could ever call a strike under such conditions. Clearly a body like the teachers with no strike tradition or organising experience would encounter the greatest difficulty in operating the decision.

Then came the Selwyn Lloyd pay pause and cuts and the extraordinary response in an outcrop of teachers' unofficial strikes on the one hand, and the acceptance by the union leaders on the other of the offer of £47½ million which the conference had refused. To their consternation Sir David Eccles immediately rejected this agreement, standing firm on the pay pause and a figure of £42½ million but also proposing to destroy the established negotiating machinery and replace it by a government-controlled body. Clearly the immediate need was to defeat the government's policy as a prelude to going on to fight for the full professional demand and this involved a major political battle with all the weapons agreed on at the conference and even more. Instead, paradoxically enough, the "non-political" leaders of the teachers emphasised "political" action and dropped all mention of strikes. A meeting of "white collar" organisations was called to "consider joint action to defend the sanctity of salary agreements", since it was expected that such a body would be safe collaborators. A real fight against the government would also have meant serious efforts to co-operate with the T.U.C., since the object of the pay pause in the public sector was to influence private industry. But even this "white collar" combination could have progressive results pro-

vided it developed clarity on the real causes of the crisis. It all depended on the mood of the rank and file not only of teachers but of civil servants, local government officers, scientific workers and others concerned, as well as that of other trade unionists.

When Sir David Eccles stated that he would impose his own salary settlement (the £42 million) by law and would at the same time legislate new negotiating machinery giving him effective control over all future negotiations, the N.U.T. Executive, under pressure from the members, decided to call another special conference, proposing for the second time the sanctions already agreed at the previous one, with the addition of a ban on school meals supervision and a programme of political action by "constitutional" methods. It should be noted that the school meals ban amounted to a campaign of civil disobedience, since the duties to be banned are statutory obligations.

Though the teachers were in the centre of the picture others too were active. Already at the end of July the Staff Side of the Civil Service Whitley Council, among other bodies, had rejected outright the pay pause and emphasised its objections to being used "to give a lead to the country" to further the government's political policy. Representatives of 683,000 professional workers attended the meeting called by the N.U.T., and they had the good will too of important bodies like the British Medical Association, the bank employees and the major civil service unions not present. In spite of assertions that "this was a non-political" protest opposition to the government was strongly expressed, especially its interference with established negotiating procedures. It was Sir Ronald Gould who made the point to the press that "for the first time in history the members of the white collar organisations had got together and had reached unanimity on a resolution". "Uproar", according to *The Times*, continued in the civil service. The Post Office Engineering Union announced that it would withdraw from all joint production councils; a statement came from the Institute of Professional Civil Servants that it was "restraining members from unofficial action which would paralyse all Britain's civil airports" (an unofficial committee had prepared a timetable of "industrial action"), and the Staff Side (see above) stated that "while general industrial action was unlikely some sections might well consider more drastic forms of protest" (than resolutions). Even the normally pacific Association of University Teachers was moved to protest at the government's attitude to their salary demands,

though, significantly enough, dissociating themselves from strike threats.

In the meantime the National Association of Schoolmasters had carried out a national one day strike following on individual school strikes, and the conference of the N.U.T. had overwhelmingly decided on the one day national strike and school meals ban proposed by their Executive. It added the extremely important recommendation to union members to join opposition political parties or, failing that, to join the Conservative Party to oppose government policy. This was indeed a revolution in professional thinking, a very far cry from the days of absolute "political neutrality". The conference, however, decided to drop the proposal for area strikes following on the announcement of the ballot figures in the selected areas which did not reach the required 75 per cent majority of the total membership. Lack of experience of strike situations and strike ballots meant that the conference failed to appreciate the importance of the very large numbers that were prepared to declare in secret ballot for strike action. In addition over half of those voting in a national referendum declared their readiness to pay 5 per cent of their salaries indefinitely to sustain the strikers.

Actually the figures both for strike action in the areas and for the levy nationally confirmed emphatically the tremendous change that had taken place in the outlook of the teaching profession. It was the success of the ballots not their supposed failure, as they falsely claimed, which alarmed the right wing, and the capitalist press fully appreciated the significance both of the ballot and of the conference by its subsequent concentrated attack on the profession for failing in its traditional "sense of responsibility". Praise was lavished on the grammar school unions whose executives' refusal to follow the line of the N.U.T. was closely connected with the fact that the Selwyn Lloyd cuts deliberately, and with decisive intent, left untouched the increases in differential payments of which they were the chief beneficiaries. Nevertheless this disunity seriously weakened the struggle in progress.

All this had a profound effect on the public, and especially on the Tory Party which met in conference a week later. There occurred the unprecedented defeat of government education policy presented by Eccles: the delegates, traditionally loyal to Ministers under fire from outside, made it clear that they were acting under the strongest pressure from teachers in the localities, masses of whom, till then active Tory workers, had declared they were finished with Toryism. Add to this the fact that the L.E.A.s

simultaneously issued a statement that the school meals ban would result in closing many schools (a success not originally anticipated) and it will be clear that all was set for success. The question being asked everywhere was: could Eccles survive?

V

At precisely this moment the teachers' leaders, following on a new meeting with the Minister, by a majority vote completely capitulated to him without gaining a single concession of the slightest value, and accepted everything they had previously publicly denounced. Truly they had "snatched defeat from the jaws of victory." Eccles was saved (and in Parliament a few days later showed his contempt for his saviours by repudiating even the worthless concessions claimed). The teachers, cried the press, were sound after all.

But were they, and are they? Only the wrath of the members which they were terrified of facing, and which the extraordinary unofficial strikes and unprecedented mass demonstrations (including an "occupation" of union H.Q.) in the following days confirmed as the prevailing feeling, prompted the brazen decision to ride the storm by refusing to call a conference to ratify their action.

But there were very profound reasons which prompted such an open—and risky betrayal. High stakes were being played for. It has been shown that if the programme of action had been operated its success was very likely. A new factor would have entered the political situation, one highly dangerous for the Establishment—the factor of a highly organised and influential opinion-forming body of professional people committed to industrial action against fundamental capitalist policies. The consequences would have been incalculable for the Tories. The possibilities of consequent links with the Trade Union movement not only for the teachers but for other white collar bodies were equally incalculable.

It is plain that the entire thought and behaviour pattern of most of the teachers' leaders would cause them to shrink from the prospect before them: it was a case of "after this the deluge". (The difficulty of breaking away from ingrained habits of thought and methods of work explains incidentally not only the unending stream of defeatism cleverly poured forth but also the pitiful vacillations such as the ridiculous "working strike").

One must, however, face the fact that though the secret ballot figures were in the circumstances

remarkable (and should have evoked pride) they did not easily appear to be so to a profession lacking in experience of action and therefore an easy prey to false and hostile propaganda deliberately disseminated not least from the capitalist press. So that there was a large body of confused and dispirited members in addition to the substantial numbers of those who would never support any action policies. The remarkable thing indeed was the steadfastness of the overwhelming majority of local union leaders throughout the country.

In addition the organisational circumstances of the ballot, previously described, and the actual conditions of their operation militated against success. Reading the legalistic document that accompanied the papers one can imagine the effect on tens of thousands of teachers accustomed to regard their "contracts" with their employers as sacred. These are some of the main factors operating in the betrayal.

But the story is by no means finished. The aftermath has shown probably an overwhelming consensus of opinion among the local leaders of the profession expressing opposition in one way or another to the leadership and demanding an organisation more effectively geared to action.

The white collar meeting has been reconvened with interesting and perhaps significant results. The first resolution passed declares:

This meeting of representatives of public service organisations recommends the constituent organisations to consider the desirability of appointing a committee with the following terms of reference:

to report and recommend on co-ordination of publicity and other functions in the common interests of members of the constituent organisations; to report on the possibility of establishing liaison machinery with limited but clearly defined functions.

A second resolution condemned the pay pause unreservedly and demanded its withdrawal and the consequent re-establishment of full normal negotiating and arbitration procedures.

There followed the decision of the Civil Service Clerical Association to introduce a work to rule policy for its 146,000 members; but on the eve of its operation it was called off by Union leaders. There was a sharp reaction among the members, and the leaders' action was not endorsed by a subsequent meeting of the Union's Executive. In the meantime the Union of Post Office Workers had begun a work to rule for the first time in its history; and later the Post Office Engineering Union also operated this policy.

So that the professional situation is still active.

None of the fundamental causes of dispute has changed, none of the issues raised has been settled, and the teachers have still to fight out their own internal battle, which will affect the final outcome.

VI

What conclusions can be drawn from this story? First, that the professional workers in the public service can no longer be assumed to be outside the main stream of industrial trade unionism. They have been drawn much closer to the working class and to the working class movement by the inexorable logic of a Tory policy which unites more and more sections of the people against it. The apparent contradiction between "professionalism" and trade unionism has not been resolved, but the prevailing trend has been in favour of the latter.

Secondly, the myth of "political neutrality" has been dealt a smashing blow especially among teachers, but not yet a decisive one. "Politics" have penetrated deeply into discussion of action on economic issues but the teachers' unions are

certainly still a considerable way off fully accepting the political implications of serious struggle on these issues. For example, one of the great contradictions of the situation, still unresolved, is that, coincident with the changes described, there has been no comparable parallel change in the attitude of the organised profession to discussion of the impact of rearmament on the social service or education, or, even, of the impact of nuclear war, though the situation is steadily becoming healthier. Similarly, there is a continued resistance to regarding international professional affairs as a vital interest though, in fact, the unions at top level are active and influential in these matters, which do have a bearing on the everyday work of the teachers.

The situation has not yet been achieved in which the teachers' organisations and many other professional bodies oppose the Tories as the political and economic expression of a system and realise that it is the system, as well as the individual ills to which it gives rise, that must also be opposed by the full weight of their organisations if their aims are to be achieved.

Progress in History

Eric Hobsbawm

SINCE history is a strikingly political subject it is not surprising that the great political conflicts of our times are reflected in it, nor that the rise and fall of particular historical schools and methods reflect the fortunes of the political struggle. This has been very much the case in British historical writing since the war. The first ten years or so after 1945, and especially the cold war, saw a massive advance of conservative and reactionary historical ideas.¹ The past five years have, on the other hand, seen a distinct retreat of such ideas. This is a heartening development to which the attention of non-historians ought to be drawn. The publication of E. H. Carr's *What Is History?* (Macmillan 1961, 155 pages, twenty-one shillings) provides a good occasion for doing so.

The advance of reaction in history in the cold

¹ I attempted to record and analyse certain aspects of this advance in "Where are British Historians Going?" (*Marxist Quarterly* II, 1, January 1955). At that stage it was not yet possible to find much evidence of a contrary trend.

war period took many different forms. The most extreme and most overtly political of these (more obvious in the U.S.A. than in Britain) were naturally the most striking. There was the rise of "entrepreneurial history" which sought the key to economic development by exploring the "creative" and beneficent activities of businessmen, and, incidentally, to rehabilitate the Rockefellers and Morgans of American capitalism against the accusation of being "robber barons" launched by radicals and reds. There was the rise of "Atlantic" history or "Western Civilisation", which sought to find an historic justification for the NATO line-up, and has since been supplemented by "European" history, which seeks to do the same for a similar area. There was the rise of "sovietology", which produced a large body of historical writing of very varying merit, but united by an impassioned hostility to the U.S.S.R., and what can perhaps best be called anti-comintern history, which investigated the early development of Communist Parties all over the world with a very jaundiced eye. There were endless refutations

of Marx and, for good measure, of such pre-Marxist ideologies as nervous writers felt to have been, in one way or another, ancestors of that dangerous thinker. I do not wish to suggest that all academic writing on these subjects or even all writing in the journals devoted to these schools, or financed by the funds made available for them, can be so dismissed. But there can be no doubt that a considerable body of it was little more than anti-socialist pamphleteering with footnotes and bibliographies, and would never have come into existence but for the particular political situation of the cold war. Much of it deserves no serious discussion at all.²

At the opposite extreme from these pamphleteers stood a group of writers apparently entirely removed from day-to-day politics, because they dealt only with the great and global fundamentals of all times. Some of them, in the heat of the moment, tried to make history into a sub-department of Providence like Herbert Butterfield (*Christianity and History*, 1949) or Arnold Toynbee, who went so far as to claim that "history passes over into theology" (*Civilisation on Trial*, 1948). Most spent their time on the more precise task of proving that history did not mean and could not prove anything, at all events about the present and the future. It was not and could not be a science. It had no "laws" and no legitimate generalisations and no verifiable explanations. If it had any explanations, they were not statements about objective reality, but—to oversimplify the matter a little—about the historian's mind. Above all it was not "inevitable" and it could authorise no predictions. A number of officials thus placed themselves at the frontiers of history waving away intending immigrants with somewhat differently shaped batons—Professors Popper and Oakeshott of the London School of Economics, Sir Isaiah Berlin of Oxford. They were joined by a large number of less theoretically-minded gentlemen (and a few ladies, like Miss Veronica Wedgwood), who simply believed that there is nothing to explain anyway. History, as the late H. A. L. Fisher thought, is just one damned thing after another, though it is very interesting to find out what happened in 1688 or 1815. The stamp-collectors, the historical novelists who

saw the only task of the historian to recreate the atmosphere of the past and to get into the skin of some long-buried person—generally of good social standing—and the simple hard-working scholars who just did not want to puzzle their heads about complex philosophical issues, all tended to subscribe to such anti-theoretical views, without realising that anti-theory itself implies a theory, generally a reactionary one.

Between these two extremes lay the entire wide field of historical revision, which normally meant the rehabilitation of conservatism and conservative historians and the denigration of progress and progressive ones. The ten years after 1945 were the heyday of what has recently been called "the Panglossian view that the Industrial Revolution never did harm to anyone". It became bad form to suggest that there was such a thing as progress in British or any other history, and those who thought so were ridiculed. The "Namierites" retold the story of British politics without the issues, ideals, passions and movements which make up political history, presenting it merely (at best) as honest and sceptical administration and (at its usual worst) as a struggle for power, by which they meant office and profit. The extremist school, as usual, illustrates the drift of these currents most clearly. Mr. Ben Roberts (of that Fabian foundation, the London School of Economics) argued in his history of the T.U.C. that the Webbs had been heedless and excessive radicals, while his colleague R. Bassett spent his energies on the congenial but vain task of defending first Stanley Baldwin and later Ramsay MacDonald against the criticisms of the left.

All these views were profoundly political, and there was a system in them, whether their authors were aware of it or not. The main target of all these attacks was socialism. Why must history not be allowed to be scientific, to establish laws, to make predictions? Because the most powerful historical theory claiming to do these things, Marxism, argued that scientific history predicted the downfall of capitalism and the victory of socialism. Why must it be shown that ideas and ideals are bad things? Because they are inimical to conservatism. As the greatest contemporary conservative historian, whose reputation stood higher in the ten post-war years than ever, observed:

"Some political philosophers complain of a 'tired lull' and the absence at present of argument on general politics in this country; practical solutions are sought for concrete problems, while programmes and ideals are forgotten by both parties. But to me this attitude seems to betoken a greater national maturity, and I can

² Thus the late Sir Charles Webster, a Tory historian, but one who disliked cant, dismissed the "Atlantic" historians as follows at the Tenth International Historical Congress (1955): "The regionalisation of the world had been a theme for discussion ever since modern historiography began, but the Atlantic was not suggested as a 'region' until the Second World War. . . . For this reason the Atlantic Community might be a temporary phenomenon."

only wish that it may long continue undisturbed by the workings of political philosophy" (L. B. Namier, *Personalities and Powers*, 1955, pp. 5, 7).

Why must it be shown that men are moved in politics only by ambition and greed? Because this proves that ideas, ideals and programmes are only window-dressing, and that for instance the history of the U.S.S.R. had been merely a blood-stained struggle between the "ins" and the "outs", into which socialism did not enter. And so on.

However, though the conservative historical guns were trained on Marxism, their salvoes inevitably also hit a much wider range of adversaries. All liberal and radical history in the old-fashioned sense, all history which believed that man's evolution is a progress, all history which attempted to apply reason and science to the past, or which believed that its investigation could help us to understand and master present and future, were equally dismissed. So was the ordinary man, who wanted to make sense of the past. The Marxists were, therefore, not alone. They were part of a sort of historical popular front, all members of which, whatever their disagreements with one another, had a common adversary. While the cold war was at its height, this was not so obvious, for the attempt to isolate the Marxists was for a time rather successful. But as soon as the political situation changed the strength of the anti-conservative forces once again revealed itself.

II

In the past few years the anti-conservative movement in history has therefore registered great advances. It is perhaps useful to recall some of them. Let us choose the very issues which, in 1955, could be used to illustrate the advance of the conservative side: the question of the Industrial Revolution and its social effects, the approach to political history called "Namierism", and the absence of general interpretations of British history.

Both the view that there was no such thing as an Industrial Revolution (but only "accelerated evolution") and that it did not lead to appalling hardship among the working classes, have been virtually routed since 1955. The first has disappeared for practical rather than for political reasons. Every country and every economist is today concerned with "economic growth", and in undeveloped countries this is understood to mean, broadly speaking, how to achieve an Industrial Revolution. Hence the economists, and consequently the economic historians, can hardly avoid facing the existence of industrial revolution, even if they do not like the idea of revolutions.

They can at best rebaptise them with such names as the "take-off into self-sustained growth". It can safely be said that it is no longer possible in 1962 to write an *Economic History of Eighteenth Century England*, as T. S. Ashton did in 1955, which did not so much as mention the Industrial Revolution.

The second view has been routed by a much more consciously political counter-attack. It was never based on strong evidence in the first place, but mainly on the silence of its opponents. For instance, the apologists of early industrial capitalism were only allowed to get away with the extraordinary statement that the "Hungry Forties" were not really all that hungry, because nobody troubled to point out that any decade which contains the Irish Famine is rightly so named. Dr. O. R. McGregor has recently said so, thus dismissing W. J. Chaloner's Historical Association leaflet on the subject, and for good measure he has also dismissed the attempts to deny that the 1930's were also a decade of hardship.³ A very small expenditure of research succeeded in dislodging the dominant academic orthodoxy which held that the material standard of life of the British workers had improved in the first four decades of the nineteenth century. In spite of some rearguard actions from the rose-coloured brigade, it has stayed dislodged.⁴ It is a very great change for the better, and undoubtedly represents not simply the fact that a few progressives mobilised their typewriters, but that the bulk of the historical world was much more disposed to listen to them. It is only justice that even the Hammonds, who were so much vilified in the reactionary period, have now received the public tribute of R. H. Tawney's British Academy memoir.⁵

Again, the death of Sir Lewis Namier (after whom the conservative, anti-ideologist interpretation of British political history has been named) has been followed by a very sharp reaction against his ideas and school. No doubt some of this is not political either. It is a reaction both against the excessive fashion for "Namierism" in its founder's lifetime, and the unimpressive performance of some of his followers who lacked their

³ Introduction to Lord Ernle, *British Farming Past and Present* (1961) cxvi, cxli.

⁴ For the moderate, middle-of-the-road view today, see A. J. P. Taylor, *Progress and Poverty in Britain 1780-1850*, in *History*, February 1960. This merely claims that "after an early upsurge in living-standards in the first stages of rapid industrialisation, the pace of advance slackened, and decline may even have set in [my italics, E.H.] by the beginning of the nineteenth century."

⁵ R. H. Tawney: J. L. Hammond (O.U.P. 1961).

master's brilliance. But it is also and increasingly a political reaction against the conservatism of which Namier made himself the spokesman. Namierism, the Communist Party's *Our History* (Pamphlet 15, Autumn 1959, *Party Politics in the Nineteenth Century*) pointed out, "is essentially a Tory revision. Though it is based on modern methods of research and covers up its more obvious prejudices behind an imposing edifice of scholarship, it is Tory none the less". Namier, says E. H. Carr, "appeared as the conservative historian". He chose as his fields England in 1760 when there were in British politics "no ideas, no revolution, no liberalism: Namier chose to give us a brilliant portrait of an age still safe—though not to remain safe for long—from all these dangers". But he also chose to by-pass "the great modern revolutions, English, French and Russian—and elected to give us a penetrating study of the European revolution of 1848, a revolution that failed, a set-back all over Europe for the rising hopes of liberalism, a demonstration of the hollowness of ideas in the face of armed forces, of democrats when confronted with soldiers."⁶ Here again, the atmosphere of 1961 is very different from that of the forties and fifties.

Lastly, it is significant that whereas in 1955 one could complain of a "remarkable shortage . . . of coherent histories of Britain addressed to an adult public" in the past few years this shortage has begun to be remedied. And what is even more significant, the authors of several of them represent a distinctly progressive or even Marxist point of view. Professor Asa Briggs's *Age of Improvement* (1780-1867) is now the standard history of its period; and Professor Briggs, who has done a great deal to inspire and advance the study of British working-class history, as writer, editor, and chairman of the new Society for the Study of Labour History (1960), belongs firmly into the radical tradition of British history-writing. Even more important, Christopher Hill's *A Century of Revolution* (1961) is now the leading history of the age of the English Revolution, which he has made very much his own since the publication of the pioneering *Three Essays on the English Revolution* (Lawrence & Wishart) in 1940. And the book, as well as Hill's other recent writings, have been received by the critics—even by the hostile ones—with the respect which is due to a major figure in the British historical world. Meanwhile publishers are falling over each other in the hurry to prepare general and coherent histories of Britain and of the world for the benefit of the non-specialist reader.

⁶ Carr, pp. 32-3.

Six years ago it was already possible to write: "Many historians are dissatisfied with the lack of a general view of the British people's progress, and with the marked conservative bias—implicit or explicit—of much history-writing in the past twenty-five years. There is room for discussion and co-operation between Marxists and non-Marxists on this ground. . . . Out of such discussion and co-operation a satisfactory new approach to the history of our country can emerge."⁷ It is clear that what was then a hope has come much closer to reality. Conservative ideas have receded, progressive ones have advanced. Even the direct co-operation of Marxist and non-Marxist historians has made significant progress, as witness the success of the journal *Past & Present*, which was founded in 1952 for this purpose, and which has, especially in recent years, established itself firmly in the historical world.

III

It is against this background that we must judge E. H. Carr's *What Is History*, a powerful and brilliant salvo fired against historical obscurantism. Mr. Carr is not a Marxist, though it is evident that he has been very greatly influenced by Marx, whom he admires, defends, and, incidentally, quotes more often than any other writer. But it is not the business of this article to point out where Marxists would differ from him. It is far more important to draw the attention of readers of *Marxism Today* to the powerful reinforcement which they now receive from one of the great academic historians of this country, and one of the ablest and most intelligent men working in the field of history.

Carr's book is polemical. The historical reactionaries, Berlin and Oakeshott, Popper, Toynbee and the rest, are his main targets. But the strength of his critique lies not only in the argument, but in the recognition that the different kinds of historical reaction represent a specific historical point of view—that of a dying class, empire or world system. Thus "Toynbee has made a desperate attempt to replace a lineal view of history by a cyclical theory—the characteristic ideology of a society in decline" (p. 37). "The renewed insistence by British writers on the importance of accident in history dates from the growth of a mood of uncertainty and apprehension . . . after 1914" (p. 94). In the epoch of the rising bourgeoisie "the theorists of *laissez faire* believed not in chance, but in the hidden hand which imposed beneficent regularities on the diversity of human behaviour; and Fisher's remark [about "the play

⁷ *Marxist Quarterly* II, 1, January 1955.

of the contingent and the unforeseen" in history —E.H.] was a product not of *laissez-faire* liberalism, but of its breakdown in the 1920's and 1930's" (p. 94 n.). "History was full of meaning for British historians, so long as it seemed to be going our way; now that it has taken a wrong turning, belief in the meaning of history has become a heresy."

But it follows from such a critique, that the historian who stands for reason, science and progress in history—or more briefly, for good history, must also stand for reason, science and progress at large. It is the great merit of Carr that he is fully aware of this. Humanity is progressing and this is to be welcomed. The progress of reason and science *is* the progress of man: "The expansion of reason means, in essence, the emergence into history of groups and classes, of peoples and continents, that hitherto lay outside it." Consequently "what disturbs and alarms me is not the march of progress in Asia and Africa, but the tendency of dominant groups in this country . . . to turn a blind or uncomprehending eye on these developments . . . and to sink back into a paralysing nostalgia for the past" (p. 143-4). "For myself," he concludes, "I remain an optimist; and when Sir Lewis Namier wants me to eschew programmes and ideals, and Professor Oakeshott tells me that we are going nowhere in particular and that all that matters is to see that nobody rocks the boat, and Professor Popper wants to keep the dear old T-model on the road by dint of a little piecemeal engineering, and Professor Trevor-Roper wants to knock screaming radicals on the nose, and Professor Morrison pleads for history written in a sane

conservative spirit, I shall look out on a world in travail, and shall answer in the words of a great scientist: 'And yet it moves' " (p. 151).

It is from this standpoint that Carr attempts to criticise the specific theories put forward by the reactionaries and to establish the methods and perspectives of proper history. Marxists will not always agree with him. Some of us may doubt whether scientists have abandoned the concept of a "scientific law" quite as definitively as he suggests, and are (or ought to be) "content to enquire how things work" without searching for basic laws (pp. 52-4). Some of us may feel that he has side-stepped rather than faced the tricky and much-discussed problem of the role of accident and the individual in history (pp. 92-102). But these are disagreements within a common frame of discussion. We join with Carr and all others who hold to the great tradition of human thought, which was at one time the tradition of the rising bourgeoisie and liberalism, and is so no longer, in the belief that "the dual function of history" is "to enable man to understand the society of the past and to increase his mastery of the society of the present" (p. 49). We join with him, as against the reactionaries, in the belief that history can generalise, can "teach lessons", can predict, and can investigate the world in ways quite comparable to those employed by the "sciences", especially today, when even the traditional natural sciences are becoming much more historical than they used to be. We join with him in our optimism and belief in progress. And we rejoice in seeing that those who share such views are once again on the offensive against those who deny them.

Some Reflections on Brecht¹

Yvonne Kapp

IT is clearly impossible in a brief space to do justice to a very complex, prolific, major writer, or to his works, which include over forty plays, many hundreds of poems, a considerable body of theoretical writings, two novels and a collection of short stories. Nor, in a tentative approach of this kind, is it in the least necessary to provide biographical details or literary references. For, at this date, apart from the spate of articles on Brecht that has been poured out in recent years, there are several books about him in English. One is supremely well documented, giving accurate and full information about productions, publications, collaborators, dates and places. Others are less valuable and factual about Brecht's work and, as regards his life and personality, appear to be based on a good deal of hearsay and the evidence of former acquaintances of Brecht now strenuously working their passage as ex-Communists in Federal Germany and points west.

Since these non-Marxist works are available to everyone, there can be no harm for once in having a look at Brecht as a Marxist writer and in doing so from the viewpoint that he is the only great literary artist Marxism has produced in our time. This view does not seem to require any qualification at all; for here is an artist who not only based an entire, and entirely new, aesthetic theory on Marxism, but one who consciously evolved a form of poetry, drama, narration, acting, production and a whole approach to the theatre and its function to express his Marxist interpretation of social phenomena and of the role of art as a lever: a power to be used in resistance to the force of deadweight apathy, reaction and inhumanity.

In the published material on Brecht in this country — and in others — there are frequent references to his "ambiguity", his self-contradictory theories and indeterminate attitudes. In the last analysis, these writers think, this makes him neutral. And, of course, they know why: he is a split personality, according to one critic, torn by such inner conflicts that his plays — which the split personality of this critic allows him to admire while detesting the man — give him away,

so to speak, revealing unconscious truths that Brecht himself tried to repress.

"Being a convinced Marxist and supporter of the Communist line on the one hand and a major poet on the other, his political and artistic selves were constantly involved in a peculiarly tragi-comic conflict" —

so runs the blurb to the Split Personality thesis, and one can only thank goodness for Psychology, always so obligingly at hand to peptonise the indigestible.

To approach Brecht from an avowed anti-Marxist standpoint is to make quite sure that one will not understand him; for, from start to finish, he was presenting human beings in the throes of the class struggle for their own contemplation. What interested him above all was the pressure—ethical, emotional, economic—that class-torn society exerts upon individuals and on their relations to each other and to society.

"The coherence of a character is shown, in fact," he wrote, "by the way in which its individual qualities conflict with one another."

Brecht is the dialectical artist *par excellence*. At a very early stage of his creative life, and when his mood was still an anarchistic one, he assimilated the meaning of dialectical materialism and applied his understanding in the most gifted and imaginative way we have yet seen.

Many of his ideas, indeed most of them — about production, acting, lighting and the many devices for what he called "ushering the audience into their own real world with faculties alert" — were evolved long before 1949 when, with the foundation of the Berliner Ensemble at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in East Berlin, he at last had the opportunity to produce his own and other people's plays as he wanted, and to set the stage — not, alas, in every case literally — for the production of the great plays written during exile and war: *Mother Courage*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Puntilla*, *Galileo*, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, *Arturo Ui*.

Brecht's conception of the epic (non-Aristotelian) narrative drama and his much publicised theory of *Verfremdung* (an invented word, frequently translated as "alienation", but nearer to the sense of "unfamiliarising", "setting at a distance") were also of long standing, and he him-

¹ Material largely based on notes for talks given by the writer in the course of 1961.

self coined the hideous word "dialecticising" to express both the epic character of drama and this "setting at a distance", which he saw as one and the same thing.

He illustrated the precise difference between the effect of the Aristotelian and the epic drama by comparing audience reaction. In the one case the spectator says to himself:

"That's right. I've felt like that myself. That's just how I am. This is all perfectly natural. It'll always be like that. I'm appalled by this character's sufferings because there's no way out for him. This is great art: it's all self-evident. I weep with their weeping, I laugh with their laughter."

Watching the epic, he says:

"Fancy that. I wouldn't have thought it. People shouldn't do things of that sort. This is all very odd, almost incredible. It must be stopped. I'm appalled by this character's sufferings because, when all's said and done, there could be a way out for him. This is great art: there's nothing self-evident about it. I laugh over their weeping, I weep over their laughter."

And, again, in illustration of the *Verfremdung* principle—the "V-Effekt"—Brecht said:

"To see one's mother as a man's wife needs a V-Effekt, which is produced, for example, if one acquires a stepfather. If one sees one's schoolmaster dunned by the bailiffs, a V-Effekt occurs: one is jolted out of a relationship. . . ."

Important as these theories are, they can be justly assessed only by reading his own writings on the theatre, shortly to be published here in translation; and that is not a particularly easy way either, for Brecht himself constantly developed and progressed; his ideas grew more diversified, complex, were deepened and enriched with successive stages of experience and discovery. In his creative work he was continuously extending the frontiers of his aesthetic knowledge. It is not surprising, therefore, that a lot of confused thinking, and even nonsense, about his ideas has always gone on, nor that, like Marx who exclaimed: "Thank God, I'm no Marxist", and Tolstoy who expressed his loathing of the Tolstoyans, Brecht should have said:

"A lot of my remarks about the theatre are wrongly understood. I realise this from the letters and articles that profess to agree with me. I feel rather like a mathematician who gets a letter saying: 'Dear Sir, I am entirely of your mind that two and two make five'."

The Plays

But to turn from the theories to the plays themselves, there is one very interesting and significant thing about almost all of them which

reflects both the double standard by which bourgeois society exists and the contradictions—the assaults on dignity—to which it gives rise as man, the individual, exploits, succumbs to or challenges the *status quo*. This theme recurs in play after play, in one aspect or another, in character after character, sometimes stated as a moral problem, sometimes as a social one, often as both. And it is this theme that has led to the charge of "ambiguity", "neutrality", to the notion that Brecht cannot make up his mind about his own or his characters' attitudes, and to the even more mistaken idea that these plays are psychological dramas. They are not. They are dialectical, philosophical dramas, more readily understandable to Marxists perhaps, though, Marxist or not, one must be very unresponsive not to feel their tremendous impact.

To give examples of this "duality": in *The Good Woman of Setzuan* one person plays two roles. The good-hearted prostitute Shen Teh, to whom the gods have kindly given enough money to open a shop, can only save herself from ruthless exploitation by assuming the character of the ruthless exploiter Shui Ta.

In *The Seven Deadly Sins*, an opera-ballet also called *Anna-Anna*, two people play one role. There is the Anna who treads the path of petty bourgeois virtue in order to make her fortune and has always to prevent the other Anna from straying into those vices which stem from the just and generous impulses of free and happy people—but not if they want to make their fortune.

In *Puntilla* the reactionary and calculating landowner when sober becomes the genial friend of mankind when drunk.

Mother Courage, the camp-follower who trades on war, never understands to the end, and beyond it, that war is her destroyer, not her life-giver. Her son Eilif is put to death because he performs the same deed in peace, when it is a crime, as in war, when it is heroic. Both these characters are caught up helplessly in a machine whose workings they can neither comprehend nor control. But the onlookers can comprehend them—and could control them.

The Caucasian Chalk Circle is pivoted on two standards of justice and two standards of motherhood—the legalistic and the human—in a property-owning society.

Galileo is about two standards of intellectual integrity in a society whose ruling circles have reason to fear the spirit of scientific enquiry and the power to silence and exterminate the scientific thinker.

The Exception and the Rule is a wry thesis

on the fact that it is positively unnatural for the servant not to murder the master when the unnatural exploitation of man by man is taken for granted.

In *Arturo Ui* the Nazis are seen to be gangsters but speak like heroes: their base and brutal manoeuvres are clothed in classical language, and in this form Brecht simultaneously exposes the bestiality of the regime and how it could deceive and corrupt a whole nation.

The Audience

This is but a single thread in the rich and complex fabric of Brecht's work, and of the plays cited; but it is always there, inextricably woven into the fundamental pattern of his thinking, and it is *the* Brechtian theme; a very important key to his work.

It was in order to make the audience aware of these dichotomies, these divided selves and situations, these conflicts and opposed possibilities, that he devised his special language of the theatre: not that of speech alone (though Brecht's style is a fascinating study in itself), but of theatrical communication in all its aspects. His aim was to make the audience capable of choice and judgment. The theatre was to stimulate, not to hypnotise. He spoke of the theatre of the past as a narcotics traffic, and meant his own theatre to drive home the fact that human beings are not, as he put it: "unchangeable, unadaptable and handed over helpless to fate."

After describing the trance-like state in which audiences sit through a play, he writes:

"To transform a general passive acceptance to an equivalent state of suspicious enquiry, you need to develop the detached eye with which the great Galileo observed a swinging chandelier. He was amazed by this pendulum motion, as though he had not expected it and could not understand it happening, and this enabled him to discover the laws which governed it. This is the attitude, disconcerting but fruitful, that the theatre must arouse by its representations of human social life. It must amaze the public and it can do so only by a technique of making the familiar seem strange. This allows the theatre to use the new social scientific method known as dialectical materialism. In order to discover society's laws of motion, this method treats social situations as processes and traces all their inconsistencies. It regards nothing as existing except in so far as it changes, in other words, is in disharmony, contradiction with itself. That applies to human feelings, too, and opinions and attitudes in which at any given time forms of social life find expression."

The spectator was never to forget that he was in the theatre, and that the theatre was part of

the real world. So the actors step forward and address him, telling him whom they represent and what they are going to do. Placards and screens announce the forthcoming action, or comment on it, or explain what is going on behind the backs, as it were, of the stage characters—and introduce songs. No one in a Brecht play pretends that it is perfectly natural to burst into song. Music is used as a deliberate break of tension, as a heightening of the spoken word, as an interlude, but almost always something presented for its own sake, to be recognised, of the stage, stagey. There are few naturalistic sets and the stage, like the Chinese theatre, is brilliantly lighted, whether the scene is indoors or out, at night or in sunlight, so that you can see what is going on—or why go to the theatre?

The Actor

The actors were never to identify themselves completely with the characters they played. It is the very opposite school of thought to that of the Stanislavsky Moscow Art Theatre. During rehearsals, Brecht made the actors say: "He said", "She said", before their lines, so that they remained aware that they were quoting other people's words. He demolished the "star" mystique by making players interchange roles and in this way realise more objectively the distinctive essence of a character.

In his many words of advice to actors Brecht drew their attention to what he called "the theatre of the street", where witnesses to an accident or an injustice play out the parts as they relate the events, without ever identifying themselves with the careless driver or the harsh rent-collector they are mimicking. And it is this "eye-witness" element that he brings on to the stage, as in the savage little sabre-dance performed by one of Mother Courage's sons. You are aware as you watch that this boy is imitating some frantic swordplay or street dance that he has seen. He is no dancer, he is no swordsman: this is how he thinks it should go, and the double effect has a strangely disturbing quality, as different from the smooth "song-and-dance" routine of the average "musical play" as can well be imagined.

It is no wonder that to put on a Brecht play—or any other—at his theatre takes from three to six months of rehearsal; and, as he explained, what is finally presented is the outcome of endless trial, exploration, rejection and re-thinking.

In fact, during his lifetime, being a very consistent as well as a modest personality, his plays were never unalterable. At the very last rehearsal he would accept suggestions made by any member of the cast, or, for that matter, by the tech-

nicians. He did them no favours: their ideas were acceptable if they strengthened and clarified the aim of the production; never to make things easier for himself or anyone else. Thus there cannot really be said to exist "definite texts"—only "last versions".

Brecht had the utmost respect for all forms of craft and not least for stagecraft. The real apparatus of stage technique is always manifest in his theatre and, when you enter it, only that part of the stage where the action will take place is hidden: there are no great, voluminous curtains that will rise but, on a visible cord, half-way up the proscenium arch, a straight linen hanging, with Picasso's dove, which will part when the play begins. "The process of showing," he said, "must itself be shown", and though the most brilliant use is made of raked and revolving stages, of costumes and décors designed by highly fertile artists, of every device known to the "theatre of illusion"—and used with a good deal more taste—Brecht's spirit, and the spirit which animates all these devices, is the spirit of reality.

Brecht's Purpose

Of course, his purpose is didactic—but never at the expense of entertainment, which he regarded as the highest good, mocking people who try to impress others by telling them not how much fun they have got out of their work, but how much effort they have put into it. Although he wrote of the "experimental theatre" and "the theatre of learning", what, in fact, the elegance and beauty of his productions, his wit, his intellectual power, the intrinsic interest of his characters and situations excite are admiration, wonder, laughter, anger, passion: all the emotions which some idiots think he wanted to chase out of the theatre. What he chased out was the "self-evident" that lulls criticism and complacency.

While the plays are episodic, they are made up of episodes in a chain of dramatic development. Only in one play—*Fears and Miseries of the Third Reich*—are there separate "sketches" of the type we associate with revue. But almost every play has its great set-piece.

For example, in *Galileo* there is the Robing of the Pope, from the naked shell of the man who pleads on the side of reason, tolerance and humanity, to the Pontiff in full regalia who pleads for no more than that Galileo shall not be tortured but only be shown the instruments of torture ("he understands instruments").

There is the scene in *Puntilla* where the chauffeur and the landowner's daughter act out a scene of married life in which their class differences are comically and also painfully demon-

strated in this sharp little play-within-a-play.

In *Mother Courage* there is the famous scene called "The Stone Speaks", when the dumb girl sounds the drum to rouse the people in the sleeping town who will be massacred. She is shot dead, but not before the town has been awakened to its danger. There is no single modern playwright who has given us scenes more telling, more pure theatre or more moving than these. Nor is there richer comedy with a sharper edge than the episode in *Arturo Ui* where the broken-down Shakespearian actor teaches Ui (Hitler) to become an orator.

Brecht knew better than most that, to understand the events of his time, a poet must acquire a knowledge of causes and not merely observe effects.

"Let us assume," he wrote, "that we want to portray great passions or events that influence the fates of peoples. Today such a passion might be the drive for power. Supposing that a poet 'felt' this drive and wanted to show someone striving for power. How could he absorb into his own experience the extremely complicated mechanism within which the struggle for power takes place today? . . . He will scarcely find out enough by going about and keeping his eyes open, though that is slightly better than rolling his eyes in a fine frenzy. The setting up of a newspaper like the *Völkische Beobachter* or an enterprise like Standard Oil is rather a complicated business and these things are not simply absorbed through the pores."

So Brecht took immense pains to acquire the knowledge he needed as a poet and interpreter of his own age. Reading *Capital* in 1926 he wrote to a friend: "I'm up to the neck in it now; I've got to know all this properly . . .". And, though he did absorb a great deal "through the pores"—which is a way of saying that he listened and observed very acutely—he made that effort, stage by stage, to understand the underlying social forces at work in his own time, for lack of which effort so much of the talent of even our most progressive younger poets and playwrights today seem pallid and amorphous in comparison with Brecht.

An Age of Change

He lived through an age of war and violence, of suffering, hunger and unemployment, of social protest and upheaval, of corruption, fascism, then war again and its aftermath of cold war; but he also recognised it as an age of change and of unlimited possibilities. And in that lies his greatness; for the years of despair fostered many artists in many countries, but very few whose creative imagination was robust enough

to strike its deepest roots in reality, and yet bear the fruit of hope.

While the founders of Marxism-Leninism gave their liveliest recognition to genius in every field—and by no means for its socialist expression—it has been left here largely to bourgeois critics to acclaim Brecht, in works representing considerable thought and some scholarship, as a dramatist of genius, and not merely as the greatest German dramatist, but the greatest of our time. So far, Communists have given little serious study to this towering and spectacular figure in the ranks of left-wing authors, while much attention and lavish tributes are paid to rather seedy writers who refrain from propping up reaction and display a friendly, if not very close, acquaintance with scientific socialism. Brecht represents one of the examples of artistic merit of which one can say to Communists, with pride: you want the best, we have it.

Brecht's whole aim was directed to creating a theatre "fit for the scientific age", as he said; a theatre that, illuminated by poetic insight, displayed man as alterable in alterable situations; a theatre that denied people the illusionary, passive and resigned attitudes that purge them, not only by pity and terror, but of all will to act. As Marx had said of the philosophers, so Brecht believed that the dramatists of the past had interpreted the world in various ways, but that the point was to change it.

When Brecht's admirers try to rescue him from the taint of Communism and a politically committed viewpoint, it is not just poor or silly criticism, it is a basic misunderstanding of the whole meaning of his work—and also, incidentally, of the choice he himself made in his life. These critics think they can strip him of his politics and rehabilitate him, fit for the bourgeois world, as a great dramatist with a deeply flawed personality. They believe this possible because, unlike many other politically committed writers and artists, Brecht's politics were not of the political platform. They were inherent in every fibre of his creative work.

A final word: all translations of Brecht are bad. But then, most of us were brought up believing that Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky and Chekhov all wrote in the style of Constance Garnett, and yet we think we know these authors pretty well, so plainly this is not an insurmountable difficulty. But the important thing is that not all performances of badly translated Brecht plays are bad. Firstly, because they were not written to be read but to be acted; secondly, because if ever an inspired producer of Brecht should appear in this country he would restore what is inevitably lost in the printed word; and, lastly, because the plays themselves are of such excellence that something of their quality always comes through.

ISSUES OF OUR TIME

Every issue of *World News* contains material essential for an understanding of the politics of our time.

In connection with the Twenty-Second Congress of the C.P.S.U., several articles have been published, and, in addition, three supplements. The first (January 13th) gave extracts from the speech of Gomulka. The second (January 20th) was a statement on Albania and the World Communist Movement, by the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The third (February 3rd) contained extracts from the statement of the Italian Communist Party and from the speech of Maurice Thorez.

"World News" appears weekly, price sixpence.

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Artists and Political Action

Artists are invited to attend a discussion led by John Gollan on Monday, 12th February. The meeting, which is organised by the Communist Party Artists Group and is open to the public, will deal with the urgent and fundamental problems facing the professional artist in the present world crisis. It will take place at 7.45 p.m. at the Caxton Hall, Westminster. (Admission 1s. 6d.).

The Outlook for the Co-operative Movement

David Ainley

THE Co-operative movement faces the greatest challenge in its history. Month by month, Board of Trade figures show a continuous worsening of the Co-operatives' relative trading position, while the multiples forge ahead at an accelerated pace. Recently, even the independent traders (increasingly linked in special trading associations sponsored by large wholesalers) have been showing greater increases in trade than the Co-operatives. The report of the Independent Commission showed that between 1935 and 1956 the Co-operatives had failed to increase their share of retail trade, while in the same period the share of the multiples had doubled.

Since then, there has been a steady deterioration. In 1959 retail trade as a whole rose by rather more than 5 per cent, while the Co-ops' increase was less than 3 per cent. In 1960 retail trade rose by 3.5 per cent, but the Co-ops' increase was only 1 per cent. The figures for 1961, when available, will undoubtedly show an even worse picture. In four years the movement has lost one-twelfth of its share of trade.

The rise in sales has not been enough to meet the increased cost of wages and other expenses. As a result, dividends have fallen from an average of 1s. 0½d. to 11½d. in 1960, and many societies have been driven to draw on reserves to prevent too sharp a fall in their dividend rates.

The multiples meanwhile have been forging ahead in every branch of retail distribution. In grocery, for example, the multiples increased their percentage of retail trade from 20 to 23 between 1950 and 1957 and from 23 to 26 between 1957 and 1960.

The drive towards monopoly in retail distribution is accelerating enormously and this coincides with increasing monopoly in urban redevelopment, with the various interests tending to converge. The Cotton-Clore combination; the growth of the House of Fraser and of Great Universal Stores; The Garfield-Weston expansion into the Supermarket field; these are merely outstanding examples of a general trend. American and Canadian trusts and finance houses join

British banks and insurance companies on an in-in foodstuffs.

creasing scale in the exploitation of these developments.

There is the gravest risk of serious and permanent damage to the British Co-operative movement unless our movement can bring to bear the whole of its tremendous resources to meet and defeat this challenge and go over to the counter-offensive. This must be a matter of vital concern not only for active Co-operators, but for the whole working-class movement.

Despite the warnings repeatedly given, societies, with a few honourable exceptions, have so far failed to appreciate the changed character of the competition they have to meet, or to take adequate and timely steps to meet it.

Supermarkets and Discount Houses

In the food trades supermarkets have been opening in the Metropolitan area at the rate of one per week and are now spreading into more and more of the main provincial areas. They involve very large capital expenditure and make the fullest use of the latest techniques. They aim at sales of from £250,000 to £1,000,000 for a single store, and spend lavishly on their initial promotion. To achieve their trade targets they set out to undersell all the established traders in their area. They work on gross profit margins of as low as 12½ per cent (2s. 6d. in the £1) whereas the national co-operative average is about 18 per cent (3s. 7d. in the £1).

Their high turnover gives them reduced wages costs and other distributive expenses per £1 of sales. Their net profit of 6d. in the £1, or even less, gives them a very high rate of profit on capital invested as the very high dividend rates paid by the most successful—20 per cent to 27½ per cent—testify. This enables them to extract all the capital they require for rapid expansion.

It is significant that in their main area of operation to date, Greater London, Co-operative food trade actually declined by rather more than 1 per cent in 1960.

Now the first American-style discount houses threaten as fierce an onslaught on Co-operative dry goods trade as the supermarkets are making

A heavy defeat for the Co-operative movement would be a major disaster for the whole working class movement. Millions of pounds of workers' property would be lost, but the workers would suffer most as consumers.

In general, Supermarket organisations are not philanthropic institutions set up to give the working-class housewife quality goods and efficient service at highly competitive prices. Like all other monopoly concerns, they are in business for profit. They can never be satisfied with even a high profit—they always strive for the highest rate of profit obtainable. Price cutting is one of the weapons essential for them to seduce customers from established traders and secure the high turnover necessary to enable them to make effective use of their advanced retailing techniques. Above all are they concerned to weaken and if possible destroy the Co-operative movement. If they can achieve this aim and secure an absolutely dominating position, they will be free to raise prices more or less at will and the working-class consumers will be at their mercy.

The Co-operatives remain, as they have been throughout their long history, the only major safeguard against the exploitation of the mass of working-class consumers.

Co-operative Policy

Can the Co-operatives fight back and win? The Co-operative establishment—the right-wing leaders of the Co-operative Union and the two wholesale societies—fought fiercely against the major recommendations of the Independent Commission. Though defeated at the Special Congress on the question of the setting up of a Co-operative Retail Development Society, they fought back, and at the following Congress an emasculated Development Advisory Committee was formed which has made virtually no impact on development or on policy in general.

The official attitude for very many years has been to accept the conditions of trade determined by the great combines and to avoid at all costs any battle with them, hoping that the Co-operatives might be left in comparative peace to pursue their unadventurous course.

The reaction to the turn of events has been that this is somehow unfair—that the supermarkets, by cutting prices and profit margins, are taking a mean advantage. There is widespread defeatism at both national and local level, and in many societies a complete unwillingness by boards and officials to face up to the stern realities of the situation or to depart in any major way from traditional and completely obsolete policies.

An admirable Amalgamation Survey was produced by the Co-operative Union and received the almost unanimous approval of Congress. There are no signs of any real drive for the speedy operation of the proposals and for breaking down the parochial and ill-informed resistance to steps which are essential if wastage and over-buying are to be eliminated and vital reserves are not to be frittered away.

A minimum immediate programme must, I believe, contain the following points:

Price Policy: The Commission recommended that societies should sell at market prices and treat dividends as a residue. It qualified this by defining “market prices” as the prices charged by the most efficient and successful competitors in each line and area, and saying it should be a principle that *the movement is never consistently undersold*.

Far too many societies still regard dividend as an essential ingredient in price structure and instruct buyers and managers to aim for gross profits which will yield a traditional dividend level. The result almost inevitably is that they price themselves out of the market, sales fall, and despite high gross profits, the net profit and dividend both continue to fall.

Prices must not only be fully competitive, but must be used in an aggressive and flexible way to seize the initiative from the combines.

In the long run, dividend can only be maintained by increased trade won by vigorous competition.

The maximum promotion of Co-operative products, giving capacity production at Co-operative factories, and including quality commodities at highly competitive prices, must be a basic part of Co-operative price policy. The “6 Star” scheme, so slow in operation, should be speeded up to this end.

Modernisation: The movement has lost its lead in self-service and is rapidly falling behind. The movement's capital invested in trading establishments is pitifully inadequate. **A major development programme for each society and for the movement as a whole is an urgent necessity. Emphasis must be on large food halls and supermarkets where effective use is made of scientific techniques to cut costs and raise productivity.** There are adequate capital resources for such a programme on the most ambitious scale if ultra-conservative financial policies are abandoned.

The first of the proposed national drives to be operated by C.W.S. and retail societies—that for footwear—has been set up, but has still, after all this time, not even started to function. The time factor is vital if the movement is to survive.

Labour: The bad staff position is an undoubted factor in recent reversals. The movement will only recruit staff of the right quality and quantity if it sets out to regain the lead it held in staff pay and conditions and staff relations before the war. *The early introduction of the five-day, forty-hour, week for all Co-op employees is essential.* Societies must be prepared to pay much higher and adequate wages and salaries in general and to pay the market price for special skills and responsibilities.

Only on this basis will it be possible to attract youth into Co-operative employment, make effective use of improved methods of staff training, and establish really effective joint consultation with workers and their unions.

Publicity and Public Relations: These must be revolutionised. They must be used not only to sell commodities but to put over the social purpose of the movement and its democratic character.

Special efforts are needed to win the cadres of the working-class movement, shop stewards, trade union branches and District Committees, active Labour and Communist workers, for active support of societies and a forward-looking policy.

The movement at all levels should make it clear that it regards itself as the Commissariat of the working-class movement, giving material help to all workers and their trade unions, fighting to improve living standards against the attack of the employers and the Tory government.

Co-operative democracy must be made to live. Members and employees should be told the facts, even when these are unpleasant. The maximum discussion of every major policy question should be actively encouraged. Ways must be found of drawing more and more members to take part in running the societies.

The Guilds and auxiliary organisations can and should be given special responsibilities, and in all larger societies District or Branch Committees should be set up to take on specific social responsibilities.

There is no Time to Lose

The urgency of the position must impress itself in every active Co-operative. The battle is already joined and we have already suffered severe casualties.

Such a trading policy must be adopted quickly and operated vigorously if the decline is to be stopped. The alternative is the total disappearance of the British Consumers' Co-operative Movement from the scene, or at best, its further survival as an historical curiosity.

The urgency of the position must impress itself

on every active Co-operator and on the working-class movement as a whole.

Our movement has powerful resources. Its trade is over £1,000 million a year, and it has over 250,000 employees. Capital resources of hundreds of millions of pounds are backed by very substantial reserves. Its membership is nearly 13 million. Through its milk and bread deliveries (Co-operative milk goes to one in three of all the householders in Britain) it is in daily contact with the decisive majority of them. No other trading organisation has the names and addresses of its customers, and great numbers of potential customers, listed and available, for easy and direct approach. In no other trading organisation have the customers direct interest in its success.

There is still all over the country a strong Co-operative tradition, a tradition of loyalty and the feeling of participation in a common enterprise. Despite the decline in recent years of the Guilds and other auxiliary organisations, there are still tens of thousands of men and women with a devotion to the movement, eager and ready to give voluntary help and to respond to a courageous and vigorous lead.

All these resources need to be mobilised and deployed on the decisive sectors of the front, and every progressive Co-operator has a role to play in this.

If the issues are properly presented they will evoke a ready response in the widest circles of our movement. Discussion of these issues, not only at quarterly meetings but wherever Co-operators gather, can result in popular pressure on Committees of Management for courageous action. The democratic vote can be used to make changes in management where these prove necessary. Congress this year can be made a sounding board for the progressive policies the movement so much needs.

The movement's enemies are already beginning to write it off. An article in a recent issue of the *Grocers' Gazette* was titled: "Decline (and Fall?) of the Co-op Empire." *The People* in a recent issue devoted a two-page spread to an article on "The Big Co-op Flop". With banner headlines entitled "The Dying Giant in your High Street" the *Daily Herald's* stable companion gloats about our movement's difficulties and foretells its doom. It is up to the whole working-class movement to prove that they speak too soon. The Co-operative movement must be revitalised as an integral part of our Labour movement, a great weapon in the struggle against monopoly and for a Socialist Britain.

Tory Policy for the Social Services

Annie Powell

BOTH Tories and right-wing Labour leaders refer to the extension of the social services in the post-war years as having made Britain a "welfare state".

The Labour leaders use the term to justify their departure from the basic socialist principles of the Labour movement, and to bolster up their fallacy that capitalism has changed its nature and the class war has ceased to exist in Britain. The Tories use the phrase according to circumstances—at one moment to catch votes around the slogan "you've never had it so good", at another to explain youth delinquency, murder, or absenteeism, on the premise that under the welfare state too much is being done for the people, that we are being molly-coddled and spoon-fed.

Under socialism the term "welfare" includes not only the standard of living in terms of food and the ability to buy consumer goods, besides housing, education, and medical and hospital treatment, but also the right to work at a job in which one is able to express one's creative ability, with good conditions of work and adequate periods for rest and recuperation. It also implies facilities for the use of leisure, specialised education for physically and mentally handicapped people, adequate provision for the chronic sick, and special regard to the needs of old people, together with the formation of new living standards and new cultural requirements.

Socialism for the first time in history has provided man with basic social rights—the right to work, to leisure, to material security in old age, sickness and disability; and the right to higher education. Socialism has given the Soviet people a great sense of faith in their own and their children's future, a sense of security, and has moulded them in the spirit of historical optimism. It is against this background I would like to review what is happening in Britain's social services, with particular reference to three pamphlets which have been published during the recent period.

First *The Welfare State*—the text of an address delivered by the Rt. Hon. Enoch Powell, Minister of Health, to a meeting held during the Tory Party Conference in October 1961. He starts off

with a quotation: "The social changes in the last fifteen years have altered the incidence of hardship so that there may well be excessive social services for some purposes and inadequate ones for others" (Plowden Report on the Control of Public Expenditure).

He then goes on to argue that politically (in the sense of vote catching) the inducements to continue the excessive social services are much stronger than the inducements to discontinue them, or to supplement any which may happen to be inadequate, and says that the trouble with the social services is that they become what he terms institutionalised.

Housing

He then makes it clear what he considers to be an excessive social service—subsidised housing—which he describes as the queerest of the social services and as the extreme instance of irrationality among them. The whole attitude of the Tories towards housing is expressed by Enoch Powell when he says:

"The natural history of the upas tree of housing as a social service, growing from the twin roots of rent restriction and indiscriminate subsidy, would be a fascinating subject for a long book. At each stage the vested interests—of protected tenants, of council tenants and of local and national politicians—in the system grow stronger and more complex, so that the wonder is not that it lived so long but that two men were found at last in Duncan Sandys and Henry Brooke, of sufficient courage and determination to lay the axe to the roots and *start hewing a way back to sanity*."

He glibly refers to 10 million family budgets based on what he terms artificially low rents.

Let us examine this Tory "Road Back to Sanity".

So bad has the housing position in Britain become that it has broken through the "silence barriers" of press and television as a result of the plight of the homeless in Greater London—a position which is repeated to only a slightly lesser degree in the country as a whole. Thousands of

families are unable to find any kind of house despite their readiness to pay rent far above the gross value and average working class levels.

Is it sanity to condemn thousands of families to rest centres and half-way houses? The Tories prate about the sanctity of family life, yet their policy breaks up families.

The policy of restricting council building and encouraging building by private enterprise means an increasing proportion of new buildings for those in the higher income groups.

The National Housing and Town Planning Council reported, on the basis of an enquiry in March 1959, that in England and Wales there were then 1,500,000 applicants for council houses representing 5 million people of all ages, of whom about 2 million were in urgent need; while in Scotland and particularly in Glasgow the situation was even worse. There, out of a population of just over a million, nearly 50 per cent are applicants for council housing.

The preliminary report of the 1961 census provides statistical evidence of the shortage. In Greater London there are only ten homes available for every eleven families. The tremendous pressure on accommodation has meant a boom not only in land and property values but also in rent.

The deficit between households and dwellings in London is 242,898; Birmingham 6,696, and Liverpool 6,269.

Alongside the housing shortage are the equally urgent problems of families living in overcrowded conditions and slums. This problem is most acute in the big industrial cities, and the extent to which millions of people live in houses with inadequate protection against wind and weather, and with an almost complete lack of modern amenities, gives the lie to the Tory boast about the success of their slum clearance programme.

As a matter of fact the rate of slum clearance has been very little higher during the past five years than it was during the five years preceding the outbreak of the last war.

The drive for the modernisation of old houses presents a similar picture. One of the arguments for the 1954 and 1957 Rent Acts was that the higher income received from rents and the powers of possession would enable landlords to modernise their property. In actual fact most landlords are not even carrying out their statutory obligations for repairs. This is especially true of controlled tenancies, where in many cases the tenants are not aware of their rights or indeed are afraid to exercise their rights, and of course with the pos-

sibility of further de-control their predicament can be appreciated.

It is true that if the water is literally pouring in through the roof the local authority can take action through the Public Health Acts, and prosecute the landlord and actually do the repairs themselves retaining the rent (less rates) until the repairs have been paid for. But I know from personal experience in handling many of these cases what a long process is involved.

The Cost of Sites

Audrey Harvey, in the pamphlet *Casualties of the Welfare State* (a Fabian publication), gives some excellent information, particularly from the human angle, of many of the problems raised by the housing situation, as well as presenting some well-documented statistical material.

However, the section on what ought to be done, while including many valuable points, falls into the far too common error of discussing the housing problem as if it were simply a question of finding land on which to build.

It is true that many local authorities with urgent housing problems have difficulty in obtaining land. We get the overspill schemes, but by and large it has to be admitted that it is the inability of the councils to pay the prices demanded by the owners of the land, rather than the availability of land, that presents the biggest obstacle to new council building.

Councils are being priced out of the market. In the London suburb of Wembley land for flats was sold at £40,000 an acre. A seven acre site in Finchley is estimated to be worth £250,000. In Solihull (Birmingham) land was sold for £10,740 per acre.

Secondly, in this section Audrey Harvey makes a staggering proposal: that landlords should be forced to allow their tenants to sublet, since this was one of the chief sources of additional accommodation envisaged under the Act.

This would inevitably be opening the way for the perpetuation of overcrowding with its attendant evils, as she herself has clearly shown in the pamphlet.

The Labour Party's policy of municipalisation (thrown out at the Labour Party Conference) obviously did not find favour with the writer, but she makes no suggestions for any alternative policy, and unfortunately falls into the trap of differential rent schemes as a means of partly solving the housing problem.

The information given in the pamphlet is, however, of great value, and certainly presents a much

saner approach to the problem than that of the Minister of Health.

Britain, however, will only solve her housing problem when we have in Parliament a government pledged to carry out a housing policy based on class principles. It is true that individual members in parliamentary debates have exposed the hollowness of the government's claims to be dealing effectively with the situation, and numerous examples have been cited of racketeering and the appalling conditions under which people are forced to live. The weakness is that as a result of the domination of the right wing their fight has been rendered completely ineffective by the absence of a Labour Housing Policy based on class principles. Nationalisation of the land has been thrown overboard, making their recent publication *Towns for our Times* just a piece of wishful thinking.

Their municipalisation policy heralded a few years ago with a fanfare of trumpets has now ceased to exist, with no alternative policy to replace it. They are committed to the repeal of the Rent Act, but so far have not indicated any other legislation to replace it, and indeed may find the actions of many Labour controlled councils in adopting Tory rent policies, with schemes based on means tests, a real stumbling block to a solution.

Again, the Labour Party has no target for building houses, which indicates an irresponsible attitude to one of the most burning problems of our time.

A Class Policy

Yet millions of workers could be rallied around a class policy for housing, the main elements of which would be:

- (1) A target of 400,000 houses a year with 300,000 built by the councils for renting.
- (2) Loans at 2 per cent to local authorities; and the restoration of subsidies to their 1955 values.
- (3) The nationalisation of urban land and free sites for council building.
- (4) The repeal of the 1957 Rent Act.
- (5) More new towns.
- (6) Nationalisation of the big building firms.
- (7) Loans at low rates of interest for house occupiers wishing to purchase their houses.

I have dealt first with housing not because it is the "queerest" of the Social Services but because it is the corner stone of them all. People become mentally and physically ill as a result of the conditions under which they live. The medical service they receive could be 100 per cent efficient, yet to what avail if they return to those

self-same overcrowded and insanitary conditions which gave rise to their original illness?

Or take the field of education. How many children do not reap the full benefit of the education provided (even in some of the best modern schools) because of the conditions under which they live—overcrowding so that proper rest is denied them and there is no possibility of any privacy for continued study.

Different Systems

In the Tory pamphlet already referred to the Minister of Health, albeit unwillingly, accepts the National Health Service as something that has come to stay, although he makes no reference to the current Tory policy of increased charges and the whittling down of essential services.

However, he makes the astounding claim that:

"Comparison with other advanced countries [presumably here he would include the six Common Market countries] where medical care is financed in different ways, and with trends in this country before the National Health Service, suggests that if the forms of organisation which the National Health Service replaced had been continued and developed, the quantity, quality and distribution of medical care here today would not be very substantially different from what it is under the National Health Service."

This statement is a falsification of fact. In Europe today there are in the main two systems of medical care: (a) The universal pattern of health organisation found in U.S.S.R. and the People's Democracies, and despite Tory attacks, in principle also in Britain; (b) The Social Insurance pattern found in the rest of Europe.

There are very important differences between the two.

In Britain the National Health Service is open to all and used by approximately 97 per cent of the people. The insurance schemes in the Common Market countries are limited to the proportion of people covered by the schemes and conditions of eligibility.

In Britain, even after the latest prescription charge of 2s. per item, the state is still paying 70 per cent of the cost of N.H.S. In the Common Market countries the cost of medical care is met by contributions from insured persons plus payments made by patients during the time of illness.

The principle of the British Health Service when it was introduced was that the best possible comprehensive medical service was to be provided for all, free according to needs, irrespective of means. While it is true that these original aims have not been fulfilled, it would be a fundamental error not to recognise the tremendous advances which

have been made as a result of the National Health Service—the provision of free medical service, including hospital and specialist treatment; the better distribution of doctors, despite the fact that maldistribution still exists; the hospital services, despite deficiencies, have been greatly improved; payment of consultants has led to an increase in numbers and better distribution; and the gap between service available for the worker and the rich has been narrowed. (Too large a gap still exists, though.)

Now, however, the Health Service is under constant attack, on the ground that it costs too much. When the service started the major portion of the cost was met out of taxation. However, as every worker knows, more and more of the cost is being shifted on to the weekly insurance contributor, with 17 per cent of the cost now being covered by contributions.

It was intended to be a free service at the time of use. This principle was first abandoned by the Labour government in 1951 for dentures and spectacles. In 1952 the Tories followed this up with additional charges for appliances and dentures; and later raised the prescription charges to 2s. per item.

In addition they increased the charges for welfare foods, cod liver oil, orange juice and vitamin tablets, with the result that the consumption of orange juice dropped by 60 per cent, cod liver oil by 70 per cent, and vitamin tablets by 54 per cent, in three months from July to September 1961. This is linked up with the fact that many families were compelled to put off treatment for eyes and teeth because of the cost.

No mention was made in the Tory pamphlet of the hospital services which present a chaotic picture over the country as a whole. The number on waiting lists, according to the latest figures, is 466,000.

National Insurance

A study of the National Insurance Scheme reveals the real stark poverty that exists in Britain today. There are approximately 8 million old people drawing retirement pensions—a minority have a superannuation or occupational pension added to the retirement pension. Some have small earnings—which must be small, otherwise their pensions would be drastically reduced. Some draw on savings—always with the fear of what will happen when their savings run out. The majority are helped by their families out of a sense of loyalty, and often at the expense of lower living standards for married sons and daughters with children of their own.

However, there are over a million old people

who have to turn to the National Assistance Board. Even with the meagre supplementary pensions these people are not living, they are simply existing. In order to get the few extra shillings they have to discuss their personal affairs with complete strangers.

Of course, the old people only represent about one-third of those drawing National Assistance. At any period within the last ten years the number has rarely fallen below 2½ million—because sickness or industrial injury benefit (for which contributions have been paid under the National Insurance Act) are insufficient to meet their needs.

It is obvious that this is a measure of the failure of the National Insurance Scheme—the original idea was that State Social Insurance Benefits should be enough to live on by themselves.

Up to 1931, the demand of the Labour movement was the non-contributory pension, but by 1937 the National Council of Labour was proposing its own scheme for contributory old age pensions on the grounds of what they termed financial practicability.

This whole question of National Insurance in the Welfare State is admirably dealt with by Katherine Hood in a Lawrence & Wishart book entitled *Room at the Bottom*, which makes dynamic reading and should be a source of inspiration to every thinking man and woman who still believes in the principle of socialism.

Apart from the question of pensions, the whole question of old people needs urgent consideration. Their housing problems are a disgrace to any civilised community, and the study of geriatric ailments and the whole psychological approach to their problems is at a low level. Spasmodic attempts by various local authorities and individuals, while laudable in themselves, are a poor substitute for a real overall plan to meet the needs of a very important section of the people.

The extension of the social services, including education, is very far from what the Tories are intending. Their outlook on the social services has been described by Katherine Hood in the article on "The Tory Attack on the Social Services" in *Marxism Today*, April 1961. During recent weeks the press has reported Cabinet discussions aimed at "economics" and the introduction of new charges especially in the Health Service. Whatever the form taken by these cuts, it is clear that the Tories will not be content until they restore the position in which everything has to be paid for on an "economic" basis, and the idea of social services is a thing of the past. It is against this undermining of our post-war gains that the Labour movement needs to fight as strongly as it does on the wages front.

Discussion contribution on:

British Social Democracy

G. Carritt

IN the January *Marxism Today*, D. N. Pritt wrote an article on "The Malady of British Social Democracy" in which he raised what he described as "perhaps the most important question before us today", of what must be done to release the Labour movement from the paralysing grip of the right wing. This is indeed a most important question for all Socialists and for the peace movement, and the full answer to it would deal with a complex process of ideas and experiences of struggle.

In order to open discussion of certain ideas that will help to break the grip of right-wing Social Democracy on the Labour movement, some generalisations must be made about the state of mind in which industrial, clerical and professional workers find themselves as a result of years of propaganda aimed at undermining belief that socialism is necessary or possible.

In general, then, I would say two dominant thoughts colour this outlook.

On the one hand there is an awareness of immense changes taking place and about to take place in the world around us, without an understanding of what those changes are already meaning to our country and movement; on the other hand, a deep sense of frustration and lack of direction in the struggle to make a better life for ourselves at home.

Industrial workers are conscious of the increasing rate of exploitation; professional workers of the threat to their living standards and the frustration of their skill and knowledge. Both industrial and professional workers become more and more cynical about the waste, misuse and failure to use our potential knowledge and resources to serve our needs. Both, in their own fields of activity, tend to lack confidence that the Labour movement can be won to use our political institutions to carry out the necessary changes, and they do not see any other source of inspiration.

Peaceful coexistence is not discussed and campaigned for as the essential form of international relations in the next ten years, during which the world socialist system will overtake the capitalist system. Another huge field of change which is recognised, but the implications

of which are totally underestimated in the Labour movement, is the liquidation in the next decade or so of all colonial empires.

Recently in the *Daily Herald* a series of articles have publicised facts about starvation in the world. Two out of three human beings on this earth are so ill-fed that their average expectation of life is twenty-six. Few, except a tiny school of backward economists and scientists, deny that this appalling mortality could be cut down in a very short time by the application of existing scientific resources. But it is far from realised that the great monopolies in this country which control the application of such resources are also blocking our expectation of plenty—though plenty of workers and scientists know that in their field of experience the block is on.

Yet if one thing is certain, it is that the millions of hunger-ridden workers and peasants of Asia, Africa and Latin America will throw off the causes of their hunger and oppression in the next ten years or so, and that in doing this they will force upon the British Labour movement the choice of either making corresponding changes in the economic and political life of this country, or of submitting to the ruling class in order that, in the new circumstances, it can continue to rule in the old or in a more oppressive way.

Looking at our home conditions, the contradiction between what we endure, knowing it not to be necessary, and what we do about changing intolerable conditions, is still more striking. Most working class and professional people's families have experienced that painful sense of the waste of our children through an educational system which arbitrarily lays down that only four and a half per cent of the country's children are capable of higher education, as against approximately forty per cent in the Soviet Union, where the standards of education are if anything higher.

Every morning and evening millions of London trade unionists, Co-operators and members of the Labour Party and Communist Party suffer from the progressive deterioration of the London Transport service. So long are the hours spent travelling and so bad are the conditions for the

passengers' health, that London's transport constitutes a permanent crisis for the community. But because of what is involved in resolving this crisis, the knowledge and resources to do it are not applied, and people stand or buy a car to add to the traffic jams.

So one could go on. But why, with our great and richly experienced movement in industrial and electoral activity, do we continue to put up with that which we know is not tolerable or necessary, and where do we start to arouse our people to make the changes in the movement that will release its power?

Of the many ideas and guides to an understanding of what must be done, there are three which I would select at this stage of the movement to advance the work of explanation and release the forces held back by right-wing ideas.

Firstly, the analysis of what is new in the world situation—and will grow with increasing acceleration—for this largely determines the situation in which our own growth or decline must take place.

Secondly, the elaboration in major fields of science and industry of the conditions which would permit of the maximum use of our available potential.

Thirdly, the kind of political leadership and perspective which will enable us to make use of the new situation and of the potential now misused or unused in our present society.

Political Leadership

This third question is without doubt the most essential and also the most difficult to deal with in our situation. But the more, and the more successfully, we press on the discussion of the other two questions, the more we are driven to deal with the third, and the more we have to think about our own equipment to deal with it and the opportunities we make for ourselves in the Labour and Peace movement to explain what is involved.

For there is always and everywhere a leading role for the Communist Party, however limited its immediate scope to influence events. One urgently needed aspect of this leading role today in Britain is the ability of Communists, drawing on Marxist theory, to foresee the general course of future developments. It is this prevision of future developments which enables the working class movement to develop its own line of march and understand the necessary stages towards its objective; to put itself in the position of winning allies and taking the initiative against monopoly capital, instead of living permanently in a state of submission to the initiative of the class enemy.

The great Marxist programmes of history have as their greatest attraction their authoritative prospect of the way ahead, which shows the connection between the work which has to be done today and the direction in which it leads tomorrow. This was true of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, the programme of the Communist International after the Russian Revolution, and the Report of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International on the United Front against Fascism in 1935. It is true now for us of the Report of the Moscow Conference of Eighty-One Communist Parties in 1960, and of the Programme adopted by the Twenty-Second Congress of the C.P.S.U. last year, and above all it is true of our own application of the international line of march to our own national conditions, *The British Road to Socialism*.

The world is already far launched into the torrential changes which will accelerate through the second half of the century. The greatest appeal of the Communist Party in the Labour movement and to professional people outside it could now become its theoretical equipment to work out the implications of these changes in the conditions of our country and movement. That has to be done, and many of those on the left know it; if it is not done, the movement remains blindfold, hitting back defensively when it is hit.

In order to start with this job, we have to increase and improve our explanations of what is new in the times we are living in. For it is quite impossible to grasp what is going to happen to Britain without an estimation of the forces at work in the world such as is given in the Report of the Eighty-One Parties. Especially in the last ten years, new forces in the world have emerged and entered into new relations, and these new forces and the new relations into which they have entered open up new prospects and methods for achieving peace and advancing to socialism.

From these new features of the world scene emerge for us the immensely important possibility, for the first time in history, of preventing war without a revolution, and of the possibility of transition to socialism without civil war.

Closely linked with this analysis of the world frame in which we take our decisions, is the way we deal with the daily experiences of waste and frustration of our national resources and abilities, not only arising from the over-all monopoly control of these resources but from the social relations which constitute the capitalist state.

Our tendency still in dealing with these ideas is too much to look backwards, to dwell on what

capitalist conditions have been in the past and could be again, rather than to build our case upon the knowledge of what is possible and the frustration that can be turned into dynamic energy for change.

Professional workers can give innumerable examples in fields ranging from rehabilitation of people who have had accidents or strokes to the neglect of new methods to increase, use and preserve food supplies around us, and above all, the waste and frustration of human material in education and life generally. The building workers, the transport workers, the men and

women making electronic equipment are full of similar stories. Yet this material is hardly used, because we have not thought of the way to use such explosive knowledge to release ideas and feeling which will force changes in the Labour movement.

There have been periods of frustration before in our long history, and sometimes small things and sometimes big events let loose the pent-up forces. Whatever it is that comes, the more we prepare for it with these ideas, the greater will be the break-through.

“A Taste of Honey”

Marshall Harris

THE editorial comment in the December issue of *Marxism Today*, concerning the “break-through” in films, displays a wrong-headedness that is most clearly seen in the way it characterises *A Taste of Honey* as “empty”.

On the contrary, this film has a substantial and progressive content, closely linked with its form. It is a work of deep humanism—a revolutionary position in the context of our commercially vulgar and generally reactionary cultural environment. Its humanism is carried through consistently in camera work, music, general style and content.

The opening shots set the tone for the whole film. Manchester, centre of industrial wealth, Victorian complacency, and a monument both to imperialism in its heyday and to the grim conditions of the working class who made that wealth possible: how do we see it? The absurd paternal statues of hard-headed businessmen float across the screen, reduced from heavy-handed respectability to figures of comical fantasy. Does not this symbolise the film’s rejection of false tradition and hypocritical morality that still tries to influence us, through countless institutions from the Boy Scouts and the women’s weeklies to the television God-botherers? The point is rammed home in the next few shots when we see a church carrying a genuine notice: “God Washes Whitest of All”. Throughout the film the photography retains this air of fantasy, transforming the dull dirty brick of the factory buildings and the dingy grime of the Ship Canal, by illuminating them with the warmth of human feeling, which has gone into their making and which remains with those that live and work there. It seeks, and finds, happiness, sorrow, worry, excitement—indeed the gamut of human emotions—in the forbidding

surface squalor of a northern industrial city. The assertion of life amid the death-throes of capitalist culture is today a progressive act.

The music in the film owes nothing to the misguided modernism which is really a retreat from reality and human aspirations. It is based on the songs of Manchester children, a culture which has been preserved in all innocence by those who have not yet experienced the full corrupting influences of our environment. They represent voices of as yet unfulfilled hope, towards which we feel an obligation and a need to encourage, protect, and make fruition possible. Who threatens children today? The dark forces of war and reaction. In music, as in photography, the film stands for life.

And in content too: we are able to identify the aspirations of youth as soon as we spot the CND badge in the girl’s lapel. She is not quite so ignorant of the forces about her! And she preserves this forward looking innocence, despite her mother, made weak by defeat, and despite her rotten surroundings. The girl is not corrupted—she finds an idyllic love with a gentle hero; and her love of life enables her, and through her, us too, to see him as a person, not a category—he is a man, not simply “a Negro”. Here, too, life challenges those who destroy humanity and rouse vicious racialism. Although the hero never returns, his love has left a lasting impression.

The homosexual boy is presented as a person, not a label. He laughs, he is sad, he can be nasty, he is mostly kind—thereby rising above his mental crippling and, indeed, the persecution he must suffer for it. We see, too, how the love and support of the girl could redeem him. We do not—the film does not allow us to—snigger viciously

at him, to cover up our own fears and inadequacies by asserting our own "virility"—a phoney commercial sales gimmick; we grow to value him as a person. All this further challenges Victorianism and big business sex.

True, there are many questions unanswered—this is not a Marxist film. Why do these problems arise? Why do corruption, ugliness, and distorted personalities exist? The film does not say; yet though it does not reveal those who are responsible, it does cherish those who are the victims. True, the homosexual goes away, probably back to his twilight world. True, the first lover never returns. Yet never is there a hint of cynicism. Even the weak and corrupt mother has lovable traits and some love left in her. Never is there a contempt for these victims of capitalism. In this the film is at one with great humanist writers like Arnold Bennett or Chekhov. No intelligence is insulted, nor are commercial

values exploited (the hoardings belong to the distributors, not the artists).

True, the film finds its values amongst squalor and ignorance. But where should it go? To cosy suburban drawing-rooms, or the board meetings of a city bank? Can we accept the assertion of life only in the context of trades union branch meetings or a rent struggle? Is anything else "empty"? No, the film reasserts a faith in humanity, a belief that man can be brother to man, deriving it from those very people whose faith has been systematically assaulted by all the attendant evils of capitalism for over a century.

This is not an "empty" film—it is eloquent, beautiful, shouting out for life. We should honour and respect Shelagh Delaney and all those associated with her, for producing the most consistent, warmest, humanist work so far shown in British cinema.

Stages of Social Development

F. Gannaway

COMRADE SID DOUGLAS'S contribution to this discussion (December *Marxism Today*) seems to clarify some of the issues raised by Comrade Robin Jardine; yet in attempting to sort out definitions he seems to have added confusion.

He quotes Marx's four modes of production

- (1) Primitive Communism (Asiatic)
- (2) Slavery (Ancient)
- (3) Feudalism
- (4) Capitalism.

Yet he is able immediately to call these ethnological stages by the mere act of dividing (1) above into two stages of social development. Surely the differences between savagery and barbarism, or say, socialism and communism (to give a comparable phase at the opposite end of historical development) are not determined by differences of racial, ethnological development. His own point in reply to R. Jardine is that different races have passed through the same stages. He says in reply to R. J. "It is inconceivable that the Chinese having reached the Syndyasmian Family and last stages of primitive communism then jumped a complete ethnological stage (slavery)." He has already quoted Marx's epochs based upon the mode of production, so why confuse the issue by again calling slavery an ethnological stage?

If we add socialism to the above four stages we have five economic stages based upon changing modes and relations of production "which have occurred during the three great epochs of savagery, barbarism and civilisation".

Another point of similar nature: he (correctly I think) says in answer to Robin Jardine that slave society broke down not through sheer inefficiency but because the social relationships act as fetters upon social production. Nevertheless, later he says that slave economy almost inevitably occurs where a community has a low level of development in the forces and means of production *which, however*, is in advance of barbarian levels, and where such a country is isolated from more advanced economies. Again he is correct the first time with regard to the significance of change in the forces and means of production, but surely it is not "*which, however*," but *because* they are in advance of what he calls the barbarian stage, but which for the sake of clarity would be more correctly called primitive communism.

I think that Comrade Douglas has advanced the discussion along correct lines, but that he will be able to make further progress in the subject and help in the study of this fascinating and valuable subject to the extent that he clarifies and adheres to his definitions.

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